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Erasmus

Nov 1898

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

ERASMUS.

BY THE

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RECTOR OF UTTERBY, LINCOLNSHIRE.

WITH A PREFACE BY THE

RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN the author of this volume—whose public services in the diocese of Lincoln are entitled to grateful recognition—requested me to write a short Preface to it, I was unwilling, though with little leisure at command, to decline the invitation, from regard to the subject, and to the writer.

Erasmus was one of the principal instruments employed by divine Providence, for conferring great benefits, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, on human society; and the study of his life inspires feelings of thankfulness, while it supplies lessons of instruction, which are especially seasonable at the present time.

The capture of Constantinople by the Turks, and the dissolution of the Eastern Empire, were calamities which Europe regarded with dismay. But the evil was overruled for good. Greek teachers emigrated from the Eastern capital. The Learning and Literature of Greece were driven westward by the tide of barbarism and unbelief; and being aided by the discovery

of Printing, were made ministerial to the revival of Letters, and to the Reformation of the Church.

Erasmus, born in Holland, at Rotterdam, in 1467, and educated at Deventer—where he was a school-fellow of a future Pope, Adrian VI.—felt the influence of these events. Many years elapsed before he mastered the Greek language, but by dint of severe study, especially at Oxford and Cambridge, he became qualified to bestow one of the greatest blessings on the world that it received for fifteen hundred years. He published the first edition of the Greek Testament, at the printing press of Froben, at Basle, in the year of our Lord, 1516.

In other respects also, circumstances, seemingly unfavourable to Christianity, were made conducive to its rapid diffusion. The continuation of the use of the Latin language in the public services of the Church was doubtless in many respects a spiritual evil. But this also was controlled for good. It preserved Latin from becoming a dead language, at least among well-educated men, and it made Latin to be, in a certain sense, universal.

Erasmus was an enterprising traveller; he was a citizen of the world; he resided at Louvain, Padua, Florence, Rome, Paris, and Basle. He spent much time in England; he knew no modern language except his own, in which few foreigners could converse with him, but he was everywhere at home. He came to Oxford with letters of introduction to Charnock, Prior of the Augustinians, in the College of St. Mary, in 1497, and soon after his arrival received a Latin letter from John Colet, afterwards Dean of St. Paul's, then at Oxford,

and wrote a reply to him in the same language. This was the beginning of a long friendship, happy and useful to both, and to the world.

The same may be said of the intercourse of Erasmus with the dear friend of Dean Colet, Sir Thomas More, and with his predecessor in the chancellorship, Cardinal Wolsey, and Archbishop Warham, and their royal master, Henry the Eighth. If Europe had not then possessed a common language for learned men, it is probable that some of the best friendships would never have been formed, and the light of pure and primitive Christianity would not have been rekindled, and diffused so rapidly throughout the world.

At the present time we speak of the publication of numerous successive editions of a contemporary brochure as a remarkable event: the circulation, however, of the author's original words is limited to a narrow range. But how different was the case even in the earlier part of the sixteenth century. The "*Moriae Encomium*" (or "Praise of Folly") of Erasmus, and afterwards his "*Colloquies*," might be called religious and political essays or pamphlets, and were disseminated everywhere by thousands of copies, and were eagerly read by popes and cardinals, kings, princes, and statesmen, bishops, abbots, and clergy secular and regular, and by judges, civilians, canonists, and magistrates, and many other laymen, and also by fair ladies in all parts of Europe, and their influence was proportioned to their diffusion.

Some religious meetings of learned and pious men of different churches and countries have lately been held; and there is reason to hope that conferences of

this kind may become more frequent, and be conducive to the advancement of Christian truth and Christian peace.

Would it not be worth while to consider whether one common language—especially Latin, with the same pronunciation—might not be adopted with advantage at such consultations as these? Would not this be better than that the members of a Conference should speak in their own tongue, and that the rest should wait for an oral translation of what had been said?

The services of Erasmus in editing the works of ancient Fathers of the Church, especially St. Jerome, and of Latin translations of portions of St. Athanasius, St. Chrysostom, and St. Basil, claim thankful commemoration. His patristic studies prepared and qualified him for the execution of a great work which was recommended to general acceptance by the depth and variety of its learning, by the tolerant moderation of its temper, and by the gracefulness and terseness of its language—his Paraphrase of the New Testament. This was translated into English by Nicolas Udal, Master of Eton College, and every parish in England was required by the royal authority of Edward VI. and Queen Elizabeth to procure a copy of it for general access in the parish church.

No one can say how much the English Church and Nation have been indebted—from that time to this day—to the benefits thus conferred upon them by the learned scholar of Rotterdam.

Erasmus was not a Luther; and Luther was not an Erasmus. The one was a complement of the other.

Their differences are brought out sharply and clearly in the epistolary correspondence between them. If Erasmus had displayed in his writings the vehement indignation of the great German Reformer, his Paraphrase of the New Testament would not have met with the general acceptance it enjoyed. None of Luther's works attained equal celebrity. But if Luther had been an Erasmus, some of the worst corruptions of the papacy would have escaped unscathed. Each of the two had his special mission; and so far as that mission was a holy one, let the Giver of all Good be praised.

We who live now may learn much from them both. Erasmus, like Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in Italy, and like the author of "Piers Ploughman's Vision,"* and Chaucer in the fourteenth century, and like our Colet in the fifteenth and sixteenth, desired to see a Reformation of the Church *within* the Church, and proceeding *from* the Church. The Reformation which he wished for, and which Colet advocated in his celebrated sermon preached before the English Convocation at St. Paul's, in 1511, was rather a Reformation of *manners*, of bishops, clergy, and people, than of *doctrines*. Not that any of these illustrious men had the slightest sympathy with those dogmas which are now made the foundation of the Romish system,—especially that of the personal Infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, and the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Erasmus clung tenaciously to the authority of the *Church*, but *not* to that of the *Pope*. He freely

* The author of Piers Ploughman's *Creed* is more anti-logmatic.

satirized the licentious Alexander VI., Borgia, and the bellicose Julius II., and in his "Axioms" communicated to Spalatinus, and probably through him to the Elector Frederick of Saxony, he did not hesitate to censure Pope Leo X.'s bull, condemnatory of Luther, as "offensive to all good men;" and he even went so far as to suggest the abolition of the festival of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin.* But he hoped that by the circulation and study of the Holy Scriptures, and by the reading of the writings of the Christian fathers, and by the discipline of such schools as his learned friend Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, had founded and munificently endowed (and for which Erasmus provided religious exercises of devotion), and by the indirect influence of classical literature and elegant scholarship, and by his own sportive pasquinades and satirical raillery on religious pilgrimages, such as that to the shrine of St. Mary of Walsingham, and St. Thomas of Canterbury, and on other abuses which he exposed to ridicule with the caustic wit of a Rabelais many of the worst corruptions and errors of Romanism which he regarded as due to ignorance and barbarism and to the influence of scholastic theology, would gradually and quietly melt away and disappear.

But the spirit of Wickliffe had revived in Martin Luther, and he, with others like him, were eager for immediate results, and boldly attacked dogmas which lay at the root of these practices. Doubtless in so doing Luther assailed some things that might have been

* See his interesting discourse "De Amabili Ecclesiæ Concordiâ," written only three years before his death, in Browne's "Fasciculus Rerum Expetendarum," vol. i. p. 462.

spared, and spared others that might have been assailed.*

Erasmus sacrificed truth to a love of unity. Luther sacrificed unity to a love of truth. Who can say whether both truth and unity might not have been preserved?

In its hatred of the Papacy Germany lost episcopacy. She forfeited that form of ecclesiastical government which had been continued in the Church from the time of the Apostles for 1500 years. The consequences of this loss are now manifest to all. St. Jerome never said a wiser thing than that there is "no schism which does not generate a heresy;" and Tertullian said no less truly that when a disruption takes place, and conflicting sects split off from the Church, their only term of communion among themselves is discord, their only "unity is in schism;" and the consequences are seen, not only in bitter religious strife, but in civil turmoils and confusion.

Let us not, however, take on ourselves to censure either of those great men, Erasmus and Luther, but let us learn wisdom from both.

The study of their history and of that of their contemporaries has a special interest for the "old Catholics" of Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and Italy at the present time, and for all who sympathize with them in their noble endeavour to reform the Church by an appeal to Holy Scripture and to primitive Chris-

* Luther's reckless dictum concerning the Epistle of St. James is one of the specimens of that arbitrary self-dogmatism and lawlessness of private opinion which unhappily marred and damaged his work.

tian antiquity. It is fraught with solemn warnings and salutary instruction to them and to ourselves.

A great conflict is at hand, which will probably be more violent than that of the sixteenth century. Two forms of anti-Christianism are rising in Europe; antagonistic to each other, and driving each other by an excess of reaction to more dangerous extremes, both hostile to the truth and to unity in Church and State; both tending to confusion in doctrine, discipline, and civil polity,—Ultramontaniam on the one side, and Unbelief on the other. The country of Luther is the battle-field of this struggle. The fatherland of Erasmus is also concerned in it. Germany and Holland have felt also the effects of the counter-movement of "old Catholicism" begun at Munich, and continued at Cologne, Fribourg, and Bonn.

The conflict of Ultramontaniam and Unbelief will probably extend throughout Europe and the world. Sounds of its approach are heard among ourselves. How shall we meet it? History testifies that a well-organized Ultramontaniam can never be effectually counteracted by a sceptical Secularism, or by a revolutionary Rationalism. Neither of these will save the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of a country. They create nothing; they construct nothing; they conserve nothing. They are only potent—and very energetic they are—in *destruction*. Nor will a discordant Sectarianism, or a creedless Erastianism—the one distracting the Church, the other seeking to tyrannize over it—preserve a state from disruption. The conflicts of the seventeenth century in England, when

Sectarianism and Erastianism had full scope, warn us of this.

Aërius and Erastus are, in fact, the best allies of Hildebrand, because they weaken the Christian Church, which is the only safeguard against the schisms and heresies of Rome, and against her temporal and spiritual domination. Our only hope of security and success against the two tremendous powers, Ultramontaniam and Infidelity, which are marshalled against each other, and are now threatening to overwhelm the world in anarchy and ruin, is in reading carefully the history of the past, and in learning the lessons, such as are contained in the present volume, which it teaches, that the security of churches, monarchies, and states depends on obedience to the Will and Word of God, and on the maintenance of that sound form of Evangelical and Catholic doctrine, and Apostolical form of Church government, which is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and which was received by the primitive Church, and which was cleared from corruptions at the English Reformation in the sixteenth century by wise, learned, and holy men, who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, steered a middle course between the temporizing moderation of an Erasmus and the rash courage of a Luther; and while they waged war against Error were not guilty of schism, but contended manfully for the Faith, while they steadfastly maintained the unity of the Church.

C. LINCOLN.

Risesholme, Lincoln,
Monday before Advent, 1874.

THE writer wishes to add the following observations.

He undertook the work for the purpose of supplying the want of a Life of Erasmus in a volume of moderate size in our own language. Knight's "Life," and Jortin's "Life," both published in the last century, are unsatisfactory; the former for several reasons, but for this reason in particular, that the author confines himself almost entirely to the connections of Erasmus in England; and the latter, because it is long and discursive, and has not the least pretensions to arrangement. Besides, these books are to be found only in old libraries, and are not available for the general reader. The only complete Life in English since Jortin's and Knight's time, before last year, is that of Butler, which is very far from conveying to the reader all which ought to be known in regard to Erasmus. Mr. Seeböhm in his "Oxford Reformers," published a few years ago, relates only a part of the Life; and Dean Milman in his Essay, originally published as an article in the "Quarterly Review," as well as Mr. Froude, in his "Short Studies on Great Subjects," have given only rapid, though lively sketches of this distinguished man. In foreign languages, there are "Lives of Erasmus," which Dean Milman has well described.

When the Memoir was for the most part compiled, Mr. Drummond's "Life" made its appearance. This fact is mentioned to show that the writer has not borrowed from him the details which are now brought before the public. On some important points he differs from Mr. Drummond; and feels especially that his work does not bring forward all the lessons to which attention is called in the following pages.

Circumstances have occurred which have delayed the publication to the present time.

It only remains to say that the editions of Erasmus's works referred to in the pages of the following Life, as "edit. Bas." and "edit. Lugd.," are the Basle edition of 1540, and the Leyden edition of 1703.

ARTHUR R. PENNINGTON.

Utterby Rectory,
Tuesday before Advent, 1874.

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ERRATA.

- Page 29, last line, *for* "Heyer," *read* "Heyen."
 „ 64, last note, *for* "Abbate," *read* "Abbatl."
 „ 128, line 15 from top, *before* "the Emperor Charles the Great," *insert* "Prince Charles, afterwards."
 „ 209, line 16 from bottom, *for* "covetuousness," *read* "covetousness."
 „ 224, last line, *for* "many," *read* "Mary."

LIFE OF ERASMUS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE life of Erasmus is, for various reasons, very interesting. He greatly contributed to prepare the way for the Reformation. "He was the man who," to use the words of Bishop Stillingfleet,* "awakened men's understandings, and brought them from the friars' divinity to a relish of the general learning. He, by his wit, laughed down the impetuous ignorance of the monks, and made them the scorn of Christendom; and by his learning he brought most of the Latin fathers to light, and published them with exact editions, and with useful notes, by which means men of parts set themselves to consider the ancient church from the writings of the fathers themselves, and not from the canonists and schoolmen, so that the most learned and impartial men were prepared for the doctrines of the Reformation before it broke forth." And in another place the Bishop says, "There was not one Greek Testament to be found in all Germany till

* "Discourse concerning the Idolatry practised in the Church of Rome, &c." London, 1671.

Erasmus printed it with notes, which infinitely took among all pious and learned men, and as much enraged the monks and friars, and all the fast friends to their dulness and superstition." He adds, "In order to prevent the extravagancies of the people in the interpretation of Scripture, his most exact paraphrase was set up in our churches." Thus we in this country, as we shall see in a future chapter, have a special interest in him. By promoting the study of the Scriptures, this work aided the progress of the Reformation.

Erasmus was the most learned man of his time in Europe. He has been justly called the envy of his own age, the wonder of all succeeding ages. He was gifted with mental faculties of the highest order, which had been greatly improved by diligent application. His industry was so great, that notwithstanding the want of books, his great poverty, the want of masters who were qualified to instruct him, and an infirm constitution which must have hindered him greatly in the attainment of his object, he rose to a proud pre-eminence above the common herd of his fellow-creatures, and secured for himself a high place in the Temple of Fame. To himself he owed almost all his knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages. In the latter all his works were written. His memory was so retentive, that at the age of thirteen he knew the whole of Horace and Terence by heart. He was "the observed of all observers." As we shall see in the following life, he held constant correspondence with princes, nobles, and others, who endeavoured to induce him to make their country the land of his adoption, and to take up his abode permanently among them. Learned men flocked to him from all parts of Europe. We are told that Albert, Archbishop of Maintz, was greatly afflicted because he was not likely to see him before his death.* As many pilgrimages were made to

* Knight's Life, p. 320.

Erasmus during his lifetime as to the shrines of any of those canonized saints whom the Church of Rome has embalmed with her praises, and has taught her followers to regard with superstitious reverence.

We, in this country, ought to feel the greatest interest in Erasmus, because he preferred our country to any other, and because he laboured successfully for the advancement of polite learning in England, during the many years which he passed among us. We shall find, in the following life, that he considered that a filial bond united him to the soil of Great Britain. Writing to an English friend, Robert Fisher, with whom he became acquainted at Paris, and who was at that time travelling in Italy, he speaks in the highest terms, not only of the fertility of the soil and the salubrity of the climate, but also of the learning and refinement of the inhabitants.* In a letter to Archbishop Warham, he says "that in England are many masters of the learned languages, and such universal scholars as are worthy of the admiration of Italy."† In an epistle to his friend Ammonius, he expresses much indignation against Holland, because it valued him so little when all other countries were uniting to do him honour.‡ Writing to a friend going to England, he says that he infinitely prefers our country to his own.§ He thus continues: "It is something to have seen Britain, celebrated as the home of men who are conversant with every branch of learning. You will find, also, that intercourse with so many remarkable for their erudition will tend greatly to the refinement of your manners and the enlargement of your knowledge. You must, however, always behave yourself modestly, and not be too free in expressing your dislike of anything which you may see in that country. For the

* Eras., Op., tom. iii. p. 218, edit. Bas. † Knight's Life, p. 120.

‡ Hoc me male habet, Italos, Hispanos, Getas, Danos, candidiores experior in me quam meos. Op., tom. iii. p. 301, edit. Bas.

§ Op., tom. iii. p. 930. edit. Bas.

English people are, not without reason, lovers of their native land. Some travellers are so rude as to find fault with everything which is different from the usage of their own country ; not considering that music, though very exquisite, may not be pleasing to the ear which is not accustomed to it. In receiving or refusing gifts, which, as the inhabitants are very liberal, they are sure to offer, be very careful. If any should be offered by real friends, accept them, and express your gratitude for them ; if by those who are insincere in their professions of friendship, politely decline them. For it is more difficult to do the latter in a becoming manner than the former." In a letter to Henry VIII.,* he says, "I am not a native of Britain ; and yet when I consider how many years I have lived in that country, how many patrons, how many excellent and sincere friends I owe to it, how large a part of my fortune is to be found there, I have as hearty a love and esteem for it as if I had drawn my first breath in it." He met with the greatest encouragement in England. The number of dedications of his works made to Englishmen, affords us convincing evidence that he found more patrons in our own than in any other country. Most of his earliest and best works owed their origin to the suggestions and advice of many of the greatest men in England, the names of some of whom fill a large space in our national annals.†

The era in which Erasmus lived is no less interesting than the individual himself. His life commences about the time of the revival of learning, and extends beyond the dawn of the Reformation. The abuses and corruptions of the Church of Rome were at this time greatly intensified. A cry for deliverance, as loud as that which rang through the pagan world shortly before the coming of Christ, ascended from a

* Op., tom. iii. p. 250, edit. Bas.

† Knight's Life, Introduction, p. 26.

groaning and travailing creation. We witness also an universal fermentation in the regions of thought. A bold spirit of inquiry was now abroad among the nations of Europe. No doubt, the examination of the treasures of ancient learning which, in consequence of the fall of Constantinople, were conveyed to Europe, was a most important means of promoting that spirit. For the effect of the study of the immortal writers of antiquity was, that the human mind was aroused from the slumber of ages, and, in the full consciousness of new-born vigour, pushed its inquiries into, and laid bare, that vast system of error which the Roman Catholic Church had imposed upon Christendom. But, above all, the effect of the revival of Greek literature was that the meaning of the text of the New Testament was brought within the comprehension of the more intelligent part of the community. Thus they were enabled to see that Rome had corrupted and mutilated the faith once delivered to the saints.

The Greeks had, long before the fall of Constantinople, prided themselves on their great intellectual superiority to the barbarians of the West. They boasted that they possessed the works of those masters of poetry, eloquence, and philosophy, who have erected for themselves in them a monument more durable than brass or marble. But we believe that they were unable to appreciate those productions of ancient genius. Their superiority seems to have arisen from their use of Greek as a living language. They possessed the golden key which unlocked the exquisitely wrought cabinet. They had written numerous treatises on etymology and syntax. But the truth must be told, that the Greeks were a stationary or degenerate nation. The present race were unworthy sons of those heroes who had performed prodigies of valour in the pass of Thermopylæ or on the plain of Marathon, of those mighty monarchs who have moulded

the taste and genius of mankind through every succeeding age of the world's history.

The Latin world had, in the fifteenth century, woke up from the sleep of ages, and was advancing with great rapidity. The lower orders had been delivered from that feudal bondage which palsied their energies, and had obtained that liberty which was their inalienable birthright. The happy result was that they soared aloft into the regions of fancy, and even grappled with those difficult questions which perplex the reason, and stagger the faith of mankind in the course of their earthly probation. The various universities were peopled with students, who applied themselves with ardour to the pursuit of literature, or the investigation of truth. The Arabians had already contributed to the advancement of scientific inquiry. We find that a love for science was diffused through the length and breadth of the territory in which Mahomedanism bore rule. The Omniades of Spain, who reigned above 250 years from the Atlantic to the Pyrenees, are especially commended for their patronage of learning. They had formed a library of 600,000 volumes, forty-four of which were employed in catalogues.

We are informed that Cordova gave birth to three hundred writers, and that seventy libraries were opened in Andalusia. The sun of literature poured a flood of light over those chosen regions, while the other parts of Europe were involved in a worse than Egyptian darkness. The learned Gerbert, who on his elevation to the pontificate, in the year 999, assumed the title of Sylvester II., seems to have derived from the Arabian doctors in Spain a large part of that extensive and profound learning which has rendered his name illustrious.* We are informed that he spent some time in receiving lessons from the Arabian professors in the

* Mosheim's "Church Hist.," Cent. 10, part ii. c. i. s. 7, 8.

seminaries of learning at Seville and Cordova. He not only studied himself physic, mathematics, and philosophy, but also encouraged others in Germany, France, and Italy to follow his example. Thus, those who were anxious to excel in arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, repaired to the Spanish universities in order that they might be instructed by those sages who were renowned throughout the world for their knowledge of the mysteries of science. This age of Arabian learning seems to have been continued from the middle of the eighth to the close of the thirteenth century.* Then the Arabian ceased to give laws to the republic of letters. If he had continued much longer his patronage of them, the vast resources furnished by printing, paper-making, and the mariner's compass, would have been at his disposal, and would have greatly aided the advancement of Mahomedanism. But having, by his cultivation of learning, prepared Europe for the Reformation, he ceased to be in a position to make use of these improvements which subsequently became the auxiliaries of the Church, and served greatly to promote her onward march through the length and breadth of the world.

But now the Greeks were to play an important part in this new intellectual era. Even as early as the thirteenth century the sun of Greek literature had risen above the horizon, and was illumining with a ruddy glow the summit of the Western hills.† In the fourteenth century the illustrious Petrarch laboured most energetically to emancipate the mind of man from its thralldom. He endeavoured to roll back the mists of ages, and to kindle in the minds of his fellow-countrymen an admiration for those stars of dazzling

* The Arabian writers date the origin of their literature from the reign of Almanzor, A.D. 758. (Gibbon, c. lii.)

For interesting details on Saracen literature see Mill's "History of Mahomedanism," c. vi.; and Turner's "History of England," vol. i.

† Smyth's "Lectures on Modern History," c. ix.

brightness, which, more than a thousand years before, had glittered in the literary firmament of Italy. It was with him pre-eminently a labour of love. In the prosecution of his object he encountered various difficulties, which only steadfast resolution, and the extraordinary genius with which he was gifted, enabled him to overcome. The most valued works of the ancients were scattered in convents, and were altogether unprovided with tables of contents and marginal notes. The attempt, therefore, before the invention of printing, to collect and arrange them, must have been attended with the greatest difficulty, especially when it was necessary to correct the errors of the copyists, and to supply, by comparing one manuscript with another, the chasms which existed in a particular work.* The happy result was that the Latinity of his contemporaries was remarkable for all that purity and elegance for which the Augustan era, the golden age of classical literature, was pre-eminently distinguished.

Through the careful study of the immortal works of the ancient authors, the minds of men began to glow with all those generous and lofty emotions for which the old Romans were conspicuous. Those ancient worthies seemed to have their proper representatives. A tribune, breathing the spirit of a Gracchus, strove to animate his fellow-citizens against the nobles who oppressed them; and an orator, with all the eloquence of a Cicero, exhorted them to bid a truce to their deadly feuds, and to unite in delivering Italy from those lawless hordes, which, "like a hideous deluge gathered in strange lands," rushing with fearful violence, had rolled with desolating fury over the fertile plains of his native country.†

* Sismondi's "Literature of Modern Europe."

† Simpson's "Literature of Italy," p. 157. See also Petrarch's stirring appeal to the nobles of Italy, urging them to deliver it from the yoke of slavery.

But though Petrarch was quite prepared to appreciate the beauties of the poets, orators, and historians of ancient Greece, still, from his ignorance of the language, he could only enjoy them through the imperfect medium of a translation. With the assistance of Barlaam, who came on an embassy to Avignon respecting the union of the Greek and Latin Churches, he acquired some knowledge of the rudiments of the Greek language. But when he was fifty years of age, he confessed that he knew little comparatively of it, for when Barlaam presented to him a copy of Homer, he told him that he wanted his assistance to disclose to him the wonders of the Iliad and Odyssey.*

When Barlaam came to Italy about the middle of the fourteenth century, Petrarch informs us that the barbarians, *i.e.*, the French and Germans, had not even heard the name of the immortal bard of antiquity.† To Boccaccio more particularly belongs the merit of having fanned into a flame the glowing embers. With the aid of Leo, a disciple of Barlaam, he composed a literal prose translation of the Iliad and Odyssey. But during his lifetime only ten votaries of Homer could be found in the whole of Italy. In the following thirty years, that is from 1370 to 1400, the sun of Greek literature was shorn of his beams. The Italians, during that period, forgot the rudiments of the Greek language.

But now, at the end of the fourteenth century, the sun, never again to be eclipsed, began to pour a flood of light over the nations of Europe. A distinguished scholar, Manuel Chrysoloras, was despatched by the Emperor Manuel to press the monarchs of Europe to hasten to the rescue of Constantinople from the infidel. He was in-

* Gibbon's "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," c. lxvi.

† *Hi barbari vix non dicam libros, sed nomen Homeri audiverunt.*

vited by the Florentine republic to assume the office of professor. We are informed that the Italians flocked to his lectures. He afterwards gave instruction in the Greek language in other parts of Italy, and was greatly instrumental in promoting the study of the immortal writers of antiquity. A multitude of scholars, of whom the most illustrious were Bessarion, Theodore Gaza, and John Argyropylos, trod in the footsteps of Chrysoloras. Their foes, like the monarchs of the wood, bristling up their shaggy manes, were standing in gloomy circles round the city of their fathers. Already they heard their savage yells, and the crashing of the boughs, as they were springing fiercely from their lair, eager to slake their thirst for blood in the red stream issuing from the mangled bodies of their fellow-countrymen assembled within the walls of Constantinople. Fear of these impending horrors hastened their departure from the city. Each of them snatched some manuscripts from the Byzantine libraries, and hastened with his precious treasures over the ocean to a country where, undisturbed by the alarms of war, they might devote all their energies to the prosecution of their studies.

These men aided to keep alive that flame which was now beginning to glow upon the hearths and altars of Italy. The Italians laboured with equal ardour for the promotion of the same object. Amongst them we may mention particularly Nicholas V., who became pope in 1447. He raised himself, by his learning, to the highest dignity attainable by a member of the Church of Rome. After his elevation, he became the patron, as he was before the friend, of the numerous learned men who were scattered through Italy. As we have already seen in the case of Pope Gerbert, by his patronage of letters, he inflicted a severe injury on his spiritual mother. He sought for books in every part of Christendom. To him the learned world is indebted for

versions of the Greek historians, of the Iliad and Odyssey, and of the most valuable works of Plato and Aristotle. Lorenzo de' Medici won for himself a high place in the republic of letters. He sought eagerly for manuscripts of the Greek authors, and was never wearied with dwelling on the beauties contained in the pages which the Greek emigrants unfolded to his astonished and delighted view. The whole of Italy was animated by a similar spirit. These pupils were soon capable of transferring to other nations the knowledge which they had acquired for themselves.

Erasmus was one of those who, as we shall see hereafter, in this manner gained a knowledge of the Greek language and literature. He afterwards became the chief means of promoting that converse with the immortal writers of antiquity which served to purify the taste, to invigorate the fancy, and to elevate the genius of the inhabitants of Europe. But above all he became, by the publication of his edition of the New Testament, the instrument in God's hands of disseminating a knowledge of those great and glorious truths, the proclamation of which was the means of delivering the nations of Europe from their spiritual bondage.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH—EDUCATION—EARLY YEARS—FIRST VISIT TO
ENGLAND—(A.D. 1467—1500).

WE have no difficulty in fixing the birth-place of the illustrious Erasmus, as he assumed it for his surname. He was born in Rotterdam, on October 28th, 1467. His father Gerard, of the town of Gouda (Tergau), in Holland, a man of much wit and vivacity, fell in love with Margaret, the daughter of Peter, a physician of Sevenbergen, by whom, after the most solemn promises to each other that they would marry, he had two sons, one of whom is the subject of our present memoir. His relations, who were anxious to separate him from Margaret, and to make him a monk, thinking that they ought to offer one son to God, compelled him, by ill usage, to leave his native town, about two years after the birth of his first son. He then went to Rome, where, as he was a good scholar, he gained a livelihood by transcribing ancient authors. While he was engaged in this occupation, they sent him word that she was dead. Thereupon, in an agony of grief, he took upon himself that irrevocable vow which separated him for ever from married life. Returning soon afterwards, he discovered the deceit which had been practised upon him. He now heard that he was again a father, and saw for the first time, the offspring of his

guilty passion for the equally guilty Margaret. She determined that she would never marry another man, and he remained faithful to his sacerdotal vows.

The original name of this son was Gerard. In conformity, however, with the pedantic taste prevailing among men of letters in those days, of assuming names of Greek or Latin etymology, he translated that name, signifying in Dutch the Beloved, into the equivalent names of Desiderius in Latin, and Erasmus in Greek. He used both of them, but the latter was his common appellation. He added to them Roterodamus, from the place of his birth. Gerard resolved, as he saw in his son an uncommon capacity, to spare no expense in his education, which he was well able to afford, as the pope had recently given to him a benefice in his native country. Erasmus was sent, when he was four years of age, to a school at Gouda, kept by a certain Peter Winkel; and soon afterwards, having a good voice, was appointed chorister in the cathedral of Utrecht. A notion prevails in Holland that he was at first a dull, heavy boy. In support of it, a passage in his writings is brought forward where he says that "in his first years he made little progress in those unpleasant studies for which he was not born; in literis illis inamœnis quibus non natus erat." But, as Bayle observes, these "*literæ inamœnæ*," these unpleasant studies, must not be understood to apply to learning, but must be referred to want of success in his musical exercises. He was sent, when he was nine years of age, to a very good school at Deventer, kept by a religious brotherhood not bound by vows, of which Alexander Hegius was the master. The latter had been instructed in Greek and Latin by Rodolph Agricola, who contributed more than any one else to the revival of classical learning, particularly to the study of the Greek language in Italy. A close intimacy existed between him and Hegius

Coming into the school-room during an examination of the themes of the boys, he looked over that of Erasmus, who was then in his twelfth year, and expressed his surprise at the style, and at the invention and beauties which it displayed. He complimented Erasmus upon them, and assured him that, if he persevered, he would become a great man. Sintheim, the sub-rector, who was his chief instructor, foretold that he would rise to the highest pinnacle of letters. He went through the usual course of logic, physics, metaphysics, and morals. His mother went to live at Deventer that she might be near him. Here she died of the plague, when Erasmus was thirteen years of age. Gerard, who was inconsolable for her loss, very soon followed her to the grave. They were, neither of them, more than forty years of age.

After the death of his parents—for whose memory he always entertained an affectionate regard—he came under the charge of three guardians appointed by his father. One of them, a merchant, did not trouble himself much about him. The second soon died of the plague. The third, his former master, Peter Winkel, with the view of depriving him of his little patrimony, and securing it for the Church, determined to compel him to enter a religious house. He was sent first to an institution, Herzogensbusch (Bois-le-Duc), where youths were trained to be monks. Here every effort was made, but in vain, to induce him to become a regular. The monks were ignorant, narrow-minded, and cruel. The love of learning had been rapidly growing in him, but he had no opportunity of gratifying it. The least breach of discipline was often followed by a severe chastisement. The flogging, once inflicted for an offence of which he was not guilty, threw him into a fever for four days. This system injured his health, and made him timid and suspicious. It also gave him a horror of corporal punishment. After having continued here for two years, he returned to Gouda.

Erasmus has described later in life the means employed during this period to induce him to become a monk, which were only too successful, in the following very interesting letter to Grunnius, one of the scribes at the papal court, in which, under the name of Florentius, he desires to be absolved by the pope from his monastic vows.* No doubt the story is in the main told correctly. We are here informed that he had a brother three years older than himself. We do not read of him in the earliest lives of Erasmus. This letter, however, if, as is undoubtedly the case, it contains the narrative of his earlier years, is conclusive as to his existence. We shall see from it that he was a very different person from his illustrious brother. The translation of a part of the letter only is here given:—

“There were two brothers—Florentius, and an elder one, Antonius. When they were only boys, they lost their mother. Their father, dying soon after her, left a small property, which would have been quite sufficient to enable them to complete their education, if it had not been diminished by the rapacity of the relations who were present at his death. For not a farthing of the money which he had at that time was found. . . . What was secured to them by deeds, and could not therefore be so easily touched by the talons of the harpies, was, however, quite enough for their instruction in the liberal arts, if a great part of it had not been lost through the carelessness of their guardians. The latter determined to train them for a monastery, thinking that they had given a wonderful proof of their piety, if they provided them with the means of subsistence. When they were all only too ready to act thus towards them, they were urged on by one Guardianus, a haughty man, who enjoyed

* Op., tom. iii. p. 919, edit. Bas. The date of this letter is not given. Since, however, the request in it is addressed to Leo X., it could not have been written before 1513, when he became pope.

a high reputation for piety. He succeeded best with one under whom he had learnt in early boyhood the first rudiments of grammar. The latter was generally reputed to be a pious and upright man—that is, not addicted to gambling, to fornication, to usury, to drunkenness, or to infamous crimes; but one who lived entirely to himself, was very parsimonious, and did not like that any one should possess more than the very moderate portion of knowledge which he had himself imperfectly acquired. For on receiving from Florentius, when he was ten years old, a letter written with some degree of elegance, he made the following sharp answer, that if he sent letters like it again, he should add to them a commentary; that his own plan was to write plainly, and with stops. He seems to have had the feeling of many with whom I am acquainted, that if he could induce any one to become a monk, he was offering a very acceptable sacrifice to God. He constantly boasts how many he has been the means of adding every year to the orders of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Benedict, and St. Bridget. When they were ready for the schools, which they call Universities, being afraid that they would become infected in them with a worldly spirit, and would decline to take the yoke upon them, he was careful to have them placed under the charge of some, commonly called *Fratres Collationarii*, who, not having a home anywhere, make money by the training of boys. The plan of these men is, when they see a boy of a noble and lively spirit, to break and humble it by stripes, by threats, by reproaches, and by various other means. All this they call taming it, and preparing it for the monastic life. The Dominicans and Franciscans are very partial to them; for they say that their orders would very soon perish if they did not obtain recruits from their seminary. I think that they have amongst them several well-disposed men; but when they have not before them the works of the best

authors ; when they live in the midst of their own darkness, according to their own manners and customs, and do not compare themselves with others ; and when they are compelled to spend a great part of the day in prayer and their allotted tasks, I do not see how they can give boys a liberal education. . . .

“The boys wasted more than two years with these men. The younger of them, being somewhat more learned than his masters, lost ground, at least in that portion of learning a knowledge of which they said that they possessed. As to one of his masters, Florentius says that he was a perfect monster ; and that he never saw a man more ignorant, or more vainglorious. Such are the men who are often set over boys. For they are not selected according to the judgment of learned men, but according to the pleasure of the Head of the brotherhood, who is generally ignorant of polite literature. Another, who always seemed to be greatly delighted with the disposition of Florentius, on finding that he was thinking of returning to his native country, began in private to urge him to join their order, mentioning many of the inducements to do so by which youths are commonly influenced. . . . While he was plying him with frequent exhortations, adding at the same time flattery and presents, and, last of all, caresses, the boy gave him this manly answer, that he had not yet a sufficient knowledge of himself, nor of monastic life ; and that as soon as he had arrived at years of maturity, he would deliberate on the subject. This man, who was not altogether a fool or a knave, then left him. I have known, however, some of this fraternity, who, not only by harsh and soft words, but also by dreadful adjurations, and, I had almost said, by exorcisms and incantations, have attempted to prevail upon rich and well-born youths, who have not yet completed their fourteenth year,

without the knowledge of their parents, to join their order. What is kidnapping, if this is not?

“When Antonius and Florentius had returned to their native country, their guardians, who had not shown much honesty in the management of their small property, urged them to enter a monastery. Florentius, when he saw them acting as if they wished to coerce the wills of their wards, asked his brother, who was nearly three years older, he himself having only just completed his fifteenth year, whether he really wished to be bound with fetters from which he could not hereafter be easily liberated. He candidly admitted that he was not influenced by a love for religion, but by the fear of his guardians. ‘What,’ said Florentius, ‘are you so mad as, from foolish modesty and the fear of men, from whom you certainly have no reason to dread stripes, to begin a kind of life, with the nature of which you are not at all acquainted, and from which, when you have once entered on it, you cannot easily retrace your steps?’ Antonius began to allege as his excuse their pecuniary resources, which, small in themselves, had been much diminished by the carelessness of their guardians. ‘There is no cause for fear,’ said Florentius; ‘we will scrape together the remainder, and with it we will go to an University. We shall easily find friends; and we must remember, too, that many who have nothing are supported by their own industry. Moreover, God will aid us in our honest endeavours.’

“Antonius expressed so strongly his approbation of this answer, that he raised expectations of himself in the mind of the younger which he had not previously entertained. They therefore agreed to postpone the question of entering the monastery to some future time, until, after having been three or four years in the schools, they should be better able, by their age and experience, to decide on the course which it was best for them to take.

This, I say, was the opinion of both of them. The elder, however, was perplexed as to the answer to be given to the guardians, who were exerting every effort to accomplish their object, without having previously ascertained the wishes of their wards. An answer was now arranged between them, of which Antonius expressed his approbation. He only asked the younger to begin the conversation, and to answer in the name of both of them, adding that he was more timid and ignorant than his brother. Florentius consented to do so, but carefully stipulated with his brother that he should abide by his determination; ‘for,’ he said, ‘if you fail me after I have given the answer, all their wrath will be discharged upon my head. Rather at once change your mind, if either by flattery or harsh words you can be moved from your purpose. For, believe me, the matter in question is of the very greatest importance.’ Antonius took a solemn oath that he would adhere to what he had said.

“Some days afterwards one of his guardians paid them a visit. He began by making a great profession of his regard for his wards, as well of his vigilance and wonderful zeal for their interests, and congratulated them on his having found a place for them in the order of canons. Florentius then, according to their agreement, answered for both.

“He thanked him for his kindness and zeal on their behalf, but added that neither he nor his brother thought that they should act with prudence, if, while, on account of their age, they were ignorant of the world, and hardly knew their own minds, and were altogether unacquainted with the nature of that which they were about to undertake, they should select any kind of life in particular. They had not yet, they said, entered any monastery, and they could not conceive what kind of an animal a monk could be. In their opinion the best plan would be for them to spend a few years in the prosecution of their studies, and then, in

due season, to take the matter into consideration. Thus there was a far greater probability that they would make a wise choice. The guardian, if he had been a pious man, possessing the wisdom of the gospel, when he considered that he should have checked them if, from the warmth of youth, he saw them somewhat too forward, and should have told them not to trust to the feeling of the moment, ought to have given the lad an embrace when he heard this manly answer. He became, however, red with anger, as if a blow with the fist had been given to him ; so that, though he always seemed to be a man of a somewhat gentle disposition, now he had no power to control his anger, and shame alone prevented him from striking him. Regarding Florentius with a look of utter scorn, he called him an idle, spiritless rascal ; resigned his guardianship ; refused any longer to guarantee them the means of subsistence ; told them that nothing was left, and that they must provide for themselves. With these and many other cruel and bitter reproaches he loaded the younger of the two, which drew from him a few childish tears, but did not cause him to alter his purpose. ‘We accept,’ he said, ‘your resignation of the guardianship, and release you from your charge.’ Thus they separated.

“When the guardian saw that he had gained nothing by threats and reproaches, he summoned to his aid his brother-guardian, a man of wonderfully insinuating manner and pleasing address. The meeting took place in a summer-house ; the boys were told to sit down ; and wine-glasses were produced. After some agreeable conversation, they proceeded to business more carefully and in a different manner. They were very bland ; told many lies about the wonderful happiness of monastic life ; held out to them great expectations from it ; and added entreaties. The elder brother, worked upon in this manner, found his resolution giving way, and forgot

the oath which he had taken more than once to be firm. The younger adhered to his determination. In short, the faithless Antonius, betraying his brother, took the yoke upon him, having first stolen whatever he could lay his hands upon—not at all a new proceeding with him. With *him*, indeed, everything went prosperously. For he was a man of sluggish mind, of a strong constitution, careful about his worldly interests, cunning, a hard drinker, much given to fornication ; in short, so unlike the younger, that he almost seemed like a supposititious child. He was always his brother's evil genius. Not very long afterwards he acted among his companions like Iscariot among the apostles. When he saw his brother miserably entangled, he was conscience-stricken, and grieved because he had ruined him by drawing him into the snare. This was the confession of Judas, and I wish that like him he had hanged himself, before he had been guilty of the impious deed.*

“Florentius, as is often the case with those who are fond of study, was ignorant of, and careless about, common things, and showed in these matters great simplicity. You may find some, before the down comes on their chins, full grown in cunning. He had a mind for nothing else but his studies. For he was wholly intent upon them, and was drawn by the force of nature towards them, having been in the schools from his early childhood. His frame was delicate, but yet strong enough for mental labour. He had only just entered on his sixteenth year. Afterwards he was enfeebled by a quartan fever, brought on by his mean and sordid living, from which he suffered, at this time, for more than a year. Whither should a youth of this kind, betrayed by every one, and destitute, ignorant of the world, and afflicted with disease, betake himself? Was not enough violence shown to drive the boy to any course?

* This brother, after this time, disappears altogether from history.

He persevered, however, in the determination which he had not hastily formed. In the meantime the guardian already mentioned, being determined to finish what he had begun, suborned various persons of different sexes and conditions of life—monks, half monks, male and female cousins, young men and old men, the known and the unknown, to carry on the plot to its conclusion. Amongst them there were some naturally such simpletons, that if their sacred robe had not been their recommendation, they might have walked up and down in public as morris-dancers, having shells in their ears, and carrying tambours. Some there were who, I think, had gone wrong more from superstition than from wickedness ; but what matters it to a dying man whether he be stabbed by a fool, or by a man of a perverse disposition ? With how many battering-rams was the mind of that boy shaken ! One brought before him the lovely image of monastic tranquillity, exhibiting that kind of life in the best possible point of view, and another, in a very tragic manner, exaggerated the dangers of the world, as if monks lived out of it, as they paint themselves, in a strong ship, while every one else is tossed about on the waves, certain to perish unless they throw out to him a pole or a rope. Another terrified him by fabulous tales. A traveller, wearied, sat down on the back of a dragon, thinking that it was the trunk of a tree. The dragon being roused, angrily turned its head and devoured him. So the world devours its votaries. Some one had happened to pay a visit to a monastery. He was strongly urged to remain in it, but persisted in his determination of leaving it. After his departure, a lion met him on his way and tore the unhappy wretch to pieces. Not to be too tedious, every kind of engine was directed against the mind of a simple boy, left alone through the perfidy of his brother, and of a weak constitution. They carried on their designs against him

with as much care, zeal, and vigilance, as if their object had been to take an opulent city. Of so much importance it seemed to these men, who were worse than Pharisees, to bury one breathing and living youth. He was in genius, learning, and eloquence, beyond his age. They hoped, therefore, that he would be a great ornament to their fraternity.

“While he was in the situation just described, and was looking round to see if there were any probability that any saint would appear to show him the way of escape from these men, he happened to visit a certain monastery in the neighbourhood of the city where he then resided. He found there one Cantelius, with whom he had been brought up from his early childhood. This man was some years older than himself, a crafty man, and one who always looked to his own interest. He had entered the monastery not so much from piety, as from the love of good living and of idleness. In learning he had made little progress, but was a good singer, having cultivated his voice from his early boyhood. He had been an unsuccessful fortune-hunter in Italy. When his parents, like birds of ill-omen, constantly reminded him of their small income, and of the number of their children, he chose a monastic life, which has this recommendation, that it affords the means of subsistence to many children who would otherwise perish from hunger. Cantelius, on hearing what progress Florentius had made in his studies, at once thinking of the part which he must act, showed a surprising affection for this kind of life, and exhorted him to enter upon it; he gave him a wonderful description of it; he exaggerated its blessed tranquillity, liberty, and concord; in short, represented it to him as the fellowship of angels. He told him repeatedly that his monastery contained a large number of books, and that its inmates had plenty of time for study,

thus showing his knowledge of the bait with which he could catch him. In short, if you had heard him speak, you would have said that it was not a monastery, but the garden of the muses. Florentius, who was open-hearted, and of the age when we often feel a great affection for some of our associates, had a strong and boyish love for Cantelius, which was the stronger as he had unexpectedly met with him after a long separation. He was not yet a good judge of character. Cantelius left no stone unturned to influence the boy, but he was unsuccessful.

“Florentius, after that conversation, was exposed to a still stronger attack from others. They had prepared more powerful battering-rams. They reminded him of the desperate condition of his affairs, of the enmity of all his friends, and lastly that he would perish from starvation—of all kinds of death the most miserable—unless he renounced the world. After having been for a long time tormented by them without being shaken in his purpose, he went back to Cantelius, merely to have some conversation with him. The latter now used every effort to attach him to himself in private as his tutor. Florentius was wonderfully inclined to form friendships, and very willing to comply with the requests of his friends. When, therefore, he was incessantly worried, and was altogether destitute of hope, he went to a monastery, not that which his guardian intended for him, but that in which he had found his old friend. It was a place so pestilential and unhealthy, that it was scarcely fit for oxen, much less for a man of delicate frame. But young men have not learnt to take account of food, of climate, or of locality. He did not, however, go to it with the intention of enrolling himself in the fraternity, but that he might escape from his tormentors, hoping that in time there might be a change for the better in his circumstances.

“In the meantime Cantelius persevered in his self-allotted task, taking advantage of the good-nature and simplicity of his companion. For Florentius sometimes read to him privately in one night a comedy of Terence, so that in a few months they finished, in their secret nocturnal meetings, the works of the principal authors. In order that Florentius might not draw back, every indulgence was given to him. The lad was gratified with the society of his equals. They sang, they indulged in pastimes, they competed with each other in making verses. He had a dispensation from fasts. No one warned or reproved him; all smiled upon him. Several months were thus spent by him without reflection. When the day was at hand for putting off the secular, and putting on the sacred vestments, Florentius, returning to himself, began to sing his old song, and to beg the guardians whom he had chosen to give him his liberty. Then again cruel threats were used, and he was reminded that his affairs were desperate unless he persevered in what he had so well begun. Cantelius, who did not want to lose his nightly tutor, to whom he paid nothing, here acted his part very well. What was this, I ask, but doing violence to a simple, inexperienced, and unreflecting boy? In short, the robe was thrown upon him against his will, although it was well known that his mind was not at all changed. After this was done, the boy was again deceived by flattery and indulgence. Thus nearly a whole year again passed away without reflection, and in the midst of amusements.

“He had now almost found that this kind of life was good neither for mind nor body. For to his mind nothing was agreeable but his studies. But in this place no importance was attached to them, and there was no occasion for them. He was piously disposed, but he was not pleased with the singing and the ceremonies in which nearly the

whole of their life was passed. You may easily imagine what a trial it is to a disciple of the Muses to pass his life in the midst of men like these. There is no hope of freedom for him unless he should happen to be placed at the head of a nunnery, which is of all kinds of slavery the worst. For independently of the continual charge of the females, he has to pass his time idly in convivial banquets. The body of the youth, moreover, was naturally so little able to endure fasting, that if, not thinking about it, he did not take his food till some time later than the usual hour, he was frequently in danger of losing his life. Internal pains and a fainting fit reminded him of his state. He had also, from his early childhood to the age at which he had arrived, another unfortunate peculiarity, which he could never lose. He could not sleep till late at night, and if his sleep were once interrupted, he could not sleep again for a long time. How much did he lament in conversation that he could not enjoy those precious hours, and that the best part of the day was lost in sleep ! How often did he make violent efforts to change his nature, but to no purpose ! His dislike for fish was so great that the mere smell gave him a bad headache, not unaccompanied with fever. What could such a mind, such a body, do in a monastery, especially in one of this description ? Just as much as a fish could do in a field, or an ox on the ocean. The fathers were not ignorant of these things. If there had been in them a grain of true charity, ought they not, when they considered his boyish ignorance or thoughtlessness, to have come to his assistance with their advice, and to have thus addressed him ?—‘ My son, it is foolish for you to strive in vain. You are not suited for a monastery, and it is not suitable for you. Seek another kind of life. Christ dwells not here only, but everywhere. True piety may be found under any vestment. We will do our best to propitiate

your guardians, and to ensure your return in freedom to them and to your friends. Thus you will not be a burden to us, and we shall not be the cause of your ruin.' This would have been a proper address to make to him.

"No one, however, gave him a word of advice. Nay, rather, they exerted every effort to prevent that unhappy fish from escaping from the net. One said that it was the plan of Satan, at such a crisis, to employ every art, every device, to cause the fall of the youthful disciple of Christ. If the latter fought this battle bravely, his future course would be smooth, and even delightful. He affirmed that his own experience had been of this description; but that now he seemed to be living in Paradise. Another reminded him of the great danger to which he exposed himself, and that St. Augustine might, in his anger, visit him with a signal calamity on account of the insult offered to him in forsaking the monastery. Several dreadful instances of his anger were mentioned. One had contracted an incurable disease; another had been struck dead by lightning; another had died from the bite of a viper. They added that the wearing of the robe was, in fact, taking upon himself the profession of a monk; and that to give it up now, was the same crime in God's eyes, and would expose him to the same infamy among his fellow-creatures, as if he had gone away after having taken the vow. Every kind of weapon was directed against the youth: but none was more formidable than the fear of infamy. '*Now,*' they would say, '*it is too late to retreat; you have put your hand to the plough and must not look back; if you lay aside the robe which you have received in the presence of many witnesses, you will make yourself the talk of the world. Where will you go? You will never again be able to come into the society of good men. You will be execrated by the monks, and an object of detestation to every one.*' Now the youth had the

modesty of a virgin, and dreaded death less than infamy. He was assailed on the other side by his guardians and friends, some of whom had stolen his property. In short, villany carried the day. The youth, with inward abhorrence, and with unwilling words, was compelled to put his head into the noose, just as prisoners in war give their hands to the conqueror to be bound, or as those who are overcome by protracted tortures, act not according to their own wishes, but those of the man who has gained the power over them.

“In the meantime the youth acted like those who are shut up in prison. He solaced himself as far as possible with his studies. This work he must do privately, though he might be intoxicated openly. Accordingly, he beguiled the tedium of his imprisonment with light literature, until, in an unlooked-for manner, God showed him the way of escape. He was called by a powerful bishop into his family, and afterwards went to a celebrated University. If this good fortune had not befallen him, his remarkable abilities would have been lost in idleness, effeminate pleasures, and convivial banquets.”

This is, in its main features, a correct description of this period of his life. The letter certainly shows some self-conceit. The false friend here referred to, Canteilius, was Cornelius Verden, a former school-fellow at Deventer. On the return of Verden from Italy, he had entered the monastery of Emaus, or Stein, near Gouda. His motives for doing so are well described by Erasmus. We find also in the above letter a reference to the fact that Verden dissuaded him from entering the monastery proposed by his guardians, and induced him to enter the monastery at Stein. To the description here given, may be added the following brief extract from his letter to Servatius, the prior of the monastery at Stein, written many years after this time, in reply to one in which the prior endeavoured

to persuade him to return to it. "You know well," he writes, "that it was by the pertinacity of my guardians, and the persuasion of wicked men, that I was forced, rather than induced, to enter the monastic life. . . . Be this as it may, I never liked the monastic life ; and I liked it less than ever after I had tried it ; but I was ensnared in the way I have mentioned. . . . Whenever the thought has occurred to me of returning to your fraternity, it has always called back to my remembrance the jealousy of many, the contempt of all ; converse how cold, how trifling ! how lacking in Christian wisdom ! feastings more fit for the laity !—the mode of life, as a whole, one which, if you subtract its ceremonies from it, has nothing left that seems to me worth having."*

Erasmus fortunately found in the monastery a young man, Herman of Tergau, of literary ardour equal to his own. They spent their days and nights in study, communicated the results to each other, and each profited by the observations of his friend. The friendship thus begun lasted through life. His hours of relaxation were employed in painting. From this monastery his first two letters are dated. They show that he had begun to form his admirable style. They were written to Cornelius Aurotinus, a priest of Tergau, in which he defends with great zeal the celebrated Laurentius Valla against his contemptuous treatment.† He tells us also that he attempted several kinds of verse. He likewise composed, during his residence in the monastery, an ode in honour of spring, the alternate verses of which were written by Herman ; a treatise on the contempt of the world,‡ the style of which shows that he had carefully studied the best Latin writers ; a treatise on the "Peace of the Soul ;" and a funeral oration on Bertha de Heyer, a widow of

* Op., tom. iii. page 1527, edit. Lugd.

† Op., tom. iii. p. 268, edit. Bas.

‡ Op., tom. v. p. 1239, edit. Lugd.

Tergau, who, he informs us, had been his refuge in want, his comfort in distress; who had given him excellent counsel, and had shown to him the same regard which she showed to her children.*

Le Clerc tells a story of him at this time of his life which shows that "the child is father to the man," and that even then, as in future years, deceit, and a want of moral courage, were his conspicuous failings. In the garden of the monastery was a pear-tree, bearing exquisite fruit, which the superior had reserved entirely to himself. Erasmus had tasted these pears, and liked them so well that he was tempted to steal them in the early morning. The superior, missing the pears, rose early to detect the thief. Erasmus ascended the tree, and was devouring the pears one after the other, when a noise made by the superior showed him that he was watched. On musing with himself how he should escape undiscovered, it occurred to him to imitate the limp of a lame lay brother in the monastery. Accordingly, sliding down the tree, he walked with a limping gait towards the house. The suspicions of the superior immediately fell upon the unhappy monk. He charged him with the offence, and, notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, inflicted upon him a very severe penance.†

We gather from the foregoing letter that the fish diets, the long fasts at the monastery, the interruptions of sleep, disagreed with him. Devoted as he was to study, he was grieved that so long a proportion of the twenty-four hours was spent in spiritual exercises and religious ceremonies. He was isolated, also, except from one or two congenial friends. He could not conceal the contempt with which he regarded the members of the fraternity. At length, after five years, which were not altogether lost, Henry de Bergis,

* Op., tom. viii. 552 E., edit. Lugd.

† "Bib. Univ.," s. 7, p. 141.

Bishop of Cambray, the person referred to at the close of the above extract, having heard of his fame, and thinking that he was a suitable person to accompany him as private secretary to Rome, whither he was going in the hope of obtaining a cardinal's hat, applied to the Bishop of Utrecht, in whose diocese Stein was situated, to the general of the order of Canons Regular, and to the prior, for their permission for him to leave the monastery. Their consent was immediately obtained; and Erasmus gladly accepted the offer. The bishop, however, abandoned his design; but Erasmus continued with him at Cambray, and took holy orders in 1492. At length, after five years, during which time he continued his studies and made some valuable friendships, the bishop, in compliance with his urgent request, promised to give him the means of prosecuting his studies at the famous Montaignu College at Paris. He entered it in 1496, when he was in his 29th year.

At this time the course of study to be followed by every student was divided into rudiments (including reading and arithmetic), grammar, syntax, poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology. Two years were assigned to the rudiments, one to grammar, one to syntax, one to poetry, one to rhetoric, two to philosophy, and four to theology. Thus twelve years were required to complete a regular course of study. The universities at Paris and Bologna were the most celebrated on the continent. The former was famous for its schools of philosophy and theology; the latter for its school of law. Erasmus chose Paris, because his object was to perfect himself in theology. He had obtained a student's place at the college mentioned above; and immediately after his arrival he took possession of it.

About this time he formed an acquaintance with the Marchioness de Vere, who resided with her tutor Battus at the castle of Tournahens. She was the widow of Philip, the

son of Antony of Burgundy. Erasmus says of her : "I cannot describe in adequate terms the goodness or liberality of this worthy lady." The marchioness was equally pleased with him, and settled on him an annual pension of 100 florins. This pension was, however, seldom regularly paid. The bishop also failed in the fulfilment of his promise. Erasmus was now obliged, by an increase of ill health, to return to his patron at Cambray. From the want of money he had been unable to obtain proper food or lodgings, and his constitution was thus permanently injured. We shall at once see how his residence at the college produced this effect when we read the description of it which he has given in his colloquy entitled "*Icthyophagia*."* He tells us that he brought away from it a constitution full of unhealthy humours, and an immense quantity of vermin. Over that college, he says, presided one John Standin, a man not of a bad disposition, but very injudicious. What with hard beds, a scanty supply of bad food, vigils, and hard labours, he had seen, in the first year of his experience, many youths of great genius and of high promise, some of whom actually died, some were afflicted during the rest of their lives with blindness, madness, and leprosy. "Was not this," he asks, "the very refinement of cruelty? . . . This treatment," he adds, "was not confined to those in humble circumstances; it extended also to not a few sons of wealthy men, whose noble disposition he quite ruined. It is the duty of a father to restrain the lasciviousness of youth by reason and moderation. But who ever heard, in the depth of a hard winter, of a morsel of bread being given to satisfy the cravings of hunger; of any one being ordered in the early morning to get water to drink from the well, which is not only pestilential and unwholesome, but also at that hour is frozen?

* "*Colloquia cum notis selectis variorum accurante C. Schrevellio*," edit. Lugd., 1664, p. 504.

I know many who have thus contracted diseases which they have never lost. Some sleeping apartments were on the ground-floor, having mouldy plaster walls, near pestilential latrinæ. All who lodged in them were sure to die, or to have a bad illness. I must not omit to mention that even those who had done no wrong were flogged without mercy. Thus, they say, pride is humbled, meaning by that word a noble disposition, which they purposely break, to make a man fit for a monastery. How many putrid sheep were eaten there ! How much mouldy wine was drunk ! These evils may have been corrected ; but too late for those who have either died, or contracted disease in consequence of them."

After staying for a time at Cambray, he returned to Paris. Here he fell seriously ill. When his illness was at its height, he had recourse to the intercession of St. Geneviève, and made a solemn promise that, if he recovered his health, he would celebrate her praises in poetry. His vow was, he says, no sooner made than the fever left him. He then thanks her for her condescension in interposing on his behalf.* This mixture of seriousness and irony is the same which he afterwards displayed when, in his Colloquy, "*Peregrinatio religionis ergo*," and his other pieces, he attacked the superstitions of the dominant church.

The irregularity of the bishop and marchioness in paying their pensions now often reduced him to the greatest distress. He was obliged to add to his scanty means by taking pupils, and he was very successful in inspiring them with a love of learning, and formed strong attachments to them. One of them was Lord Mountjoy, who had been page of honour to Prince Henry, afterwards Henry VIII. Thus began a life-long friendship, which, as we shall see directly, was the means of bringing him to England. Lord

* Ep. 154, app., edit. Lugd.

Mountjoy removed him to better lodgings, and settled on him a pension of 100 crowns. Another pupil was Thomas Grey, son of the Marquis of Dorset. An offer was also made to him to educate an ignorant English youth for a bishopric.* He was to have 100 crowns to teach him for one year, and was promised a benefice in a few months, and a loan of 300 crowns till he obtained it. Erasmus, however, not feeling inclined to waste his time in training a dull youth, declined the proposal. This necessity of taking pupils was a great hindrance to him in the prosecution of his studies. His progress was also retarded by constant ill health, caused, as we have seen, by scanty food and hard beds, as well as by rigid vigils and labours. He lost time also by frequent visits to Holland, to look after the remains of his patrimony. In England, however, he began to be known, and to gather round him a host of friends. By his untiring industry, he had already laid the foundation of that learning which has been the means of transmitting his name with honour to generations then unborn.

Erasmus arrived in England in 1498, in the train of the young Lord Mountjoy. Immediately after his arrival he repaired to the University of Oxford. He was not at this time generally known; but was forcing his way to celebrity. In going to Oxford, his object was to join that little band of men north of the Alps, who, as we have seen in our introductory chapter, were here applying themselves with ardour to the study of the Greek language and literature. Among them were W. Grocyn, Latimer, and Linacre. The last was physician to Henrys VII. and VIII., and founder of the Royal College of Physicians in London.

* Knight, in his "Life of Erasmus," p. 19, says that the person here alluded to was James Stanley, son of Thomas, Earl of Derby, and Margaret, Countess of Richmond, made Bishop of Ely in 1506; but the statement is incorrect.

Under Grocyn's instruction Erasmus made great progress, and, as Gibbon has justly observed, learnt Greek at Oxford to teach it at Cambridge.*

He did not, at the time, foresee the purpose to which the knowledge thus obtained might be applied, and that he was sharpening and polishing a weapon which, wielded by his own hand and the hands of others, would smite down the principalities and powers of darkness. His wish was simply to gratify the longing for knowledge which had become the passion of his life. Already the shadows of evening were falling upon his path. The sunken eye, the wan and wasted countenance, the form bent as if from the infirmities of old age, showed very plainly that he had known that "weariness of the flesh" which springs from excessive study, and gave warning that hard mental toil and a meagre diet had undermined his constitution, and seemed likely at the time to bring him to a premature grave.

His great friend at Oxford was John Colet, afterwards the celebrated Dean of St. Paul's, and founder of St. Paul's School, a son of Sir Henry Colet, a wealthy city merchant, who had been twice Lord Mayor of London. He had been early sent to the University of Oxford; afterwards taking orders, he had been presented to a living in Suffolk, and a prebend in Yorkshire. Colet had willingly sacrificed the wealth which he might have accumulated if he had followed his father's occupation, as well as the prospect of distinction in the service of the state, which, through his father's influence at court, presented itself to him. The sole survivor of a family of twenty-two brothers and sisters, he had forsaken those temples in the great metropolis where Pleasure erected her throne and assembled constantly crowds of her worshippers, that he might devote himself at Oxford to

* Erasmus took up his abode at Oxford at the College of St. Mary. Its gateway, nearly opposite New Inn Hall, is still standing.

the study of the Scriptures, and to the propagation of the results of that study among all who came within reach of his influence. When Erasmus came to Oxford, he was lecturing on the Epistles of St. Paul.

Colet had just returned from Italy, where he had been applying himself diligently to the study of the Greek language. Happily he had escaped the contaminating influence of those who, at this time of the revival of classical literature, professed belief in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Pliny, and treated Christianity as a cunningly-devised fable; "who," as Lord Macaulay writes, "regarded those Christian mysteries, of which they were stewards, just as the Augur Cicero and the High Pontiff Cæsar regarded the Sibylline books and the pecking of the sacred chickens; who, among themselves, spoke of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Trinity in the same tone in which Cotta and Velleius talked of the oracle of Delphi, or the voice of Faunus in the mountains."* He had been led to quench his thirst in a purer fountain than any which sparkled amid the "consecrated bowers" of Athens.

At the time of Colet's visit, Alexander VI. wore the papal tiara. The vice and profligacy which prevailed in his court were enough to disenchant the most ardent admirer of the papal system. His palace was the scene of Bacchanalian orgies. Licentious songs, swelled by a chorus of revelers, echoed through its banqueting-hall. The Pope himself quaffed large draughts of wine from the foaming goblet. The grossest venality prevailed in the papal court. The highest dignities in the Church were conferred without shame on the best bidder. We may suppose that thus an earnest desire was awakened in Colet's mind for a reformation of the Church of Rome in its head and its mem-

bers. We may imagine also, with a recent writer,* that he had heard at Florence how Savonarola, the celebrated prior of San Marco, horror-stricken at the revival of paganism in a Christian city, and at the vice and scepticism which very generally prevailed, had determined to confine himself almost entirely to prayerful meditation on the records of heavenly truth. We may fancy that he had often been a member of those crowded congregations in the Duomo of Florence, which listened spell-bound to the burning words of this preacher of righteousness,† as, carefully expounding the Scriptures, he denounced the Divine vengeance upon the rulers of the Church and the inhabitants of Italy for their vices and crimes; and that he had witnessed the wonderful effect produced by his oratory when the citizens, whose lives had hitherto been one long holiday, read the word of God as they pursued their accustomed occupations, and banished from their walls that sensuality which had lifted its unblushing front in her streets in the full light of day.‡ Thus then he had been led to expound the Scriptures at Oxford, hoping that through the influence of his hearers, many of whom “would go everywhere preaching the word,” he should promote the onward march of moral and spiritual improvement.

The schoolmen had hitherto reigned supreme at Oxford. They held the verbal inspiration of Scripture; they fixed attention upon single verses, to which they attached different senses, and wasted their time in employing them to carry on subtle and unprofitable disquisitions on such sub-

* Mr. Frederick Seebohm, in his work “The Oxford Reformers of 1498,” p. 7.

† Colet left England in the year 1494 on his way to Italy. Then he must have been twenty-three years of age.—Seebohm’s “Oxford Reformers.”

‡ Savonarola preached his first sermon in the Duomo or Cathedral of Florence in Lent, 1491.

jects as these :—Whether we shall eat and drink after the resurrection? Whether angels can be in more than one place at the same time? What was the physical condition of the human body in paradise? Whether Christ could have taken upon Him the nature of a woman or an ass? Their appetite for this kind of strife was insatiable. They became heated by argument, and continued to dispute on these trifling questions as though their eternal destiny depended on the settlement of them. To their rash speculations the words of the poet may be applied :

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

They dared even to pry into the secrets of Jehovah, to talk as if they had been admitted to His council-chamber, and knew, for instance, how He had made chaos to disappear, and had called the vast fabric of the heavens and the earth into existence ; how it was that He had caused the stain of Adam's sin to descend to all his posterity ; how it was that the power of the Highest had overshadowed the Virgin, when Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea. They dared even to describe minutely the infernal regions, as though they had themselves been admitted to that dark prison-house of pain.* The dust raised by these encounters as the combatants met in the centre of the tilt-ground with the reverberation of two mighty thunder-clouds which rush together in the firmament of heaven, obscured the view of those great and solemn truths, on the due reception and maintenance of which depended their eternity. The Bible had become a mere arsenal of texts, which they wrested from their connection with the preceding passage, and employed for the purpose of weaving their theological subtleties. It had ceased to be a record of real events, or to give a con-

* See the “Praise of Folly,” by Erasmus, a translation of a part of which is given hereafter.

nected account of the lives of individuals. They practically neglected its teaching altogether.

Against this system of the schoolmen Colet entered his decided protest. He looked upon Scripture as a whole, and not as a carefully prepared collection of texts. He endeavoured to ascertain the drift of the apostle's argument; he compared St. Paul's statements of divine truth with those of St. John, in order that he might show the harmony existing between them; he proved that the Epistles were a series of letters, addressed to living men, and were designed to be "profitable to them for correction and instruction in righteousness." But while he constantly evinced his love for St. Paul as an earnest teacher of divine truth, he considered that to Christ was due his devoted and dutiful allegiance. His hearers were now told for the first time to look upon the Gospels as a vivid record of the teaching of their adorable Redeemer. He informed them that he had not found in Scripture a number of absurd propositions to which he must compel himself to yield an unqualified assent; but a Being whom he could take as "his leader on the heavenly road," whom he could love with a love far stronger than he gave to any object of earthly attachment, and to whom he could devote that body, soul, and spirit, which are His.

These expositions of divine truth produced a wonderful impression at Oxford. Multitudes flocked to hear him. As Erasmus says, Colet had not taken any degree in theology (the qualification required by the statutes for lecturing on the Bible); yet there was no doctor of the law or divinity, no abbot or dignitary, who did not come to hear him. Some no doubt came to cavil at the lecture, and to find matter of accusation against him, because he assailed the dominant school of theology at Oxford; but as we are informed that they came again and again, and brought even

their note-books,* we may reasonably conclude that they came at last, because they were convinced that he was bringing before them the fundamental truths of Christianity.

Erasmus had often attended Colet's lectures, and had often argued with him on the system of the schoolmen. The study of their works had created in his mind a disgust for theology altogether; but he was not yet prepared to abandon his allegiance to them. He spent the greater part of 1499 at Oxford. Prior Charnock, with whom he had taken up his abode at the college of St. Mary the Virgin, introduced him to Colet. He speaks in glowing terms of the friendships which he had formed during his residence in the University. Now also began that intimacy with Thomas More, afterwards the celebrated Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor in the reign of Henry VIII., who fell a victim to the arbitrary will of that monarch. He probably first met him in London.† His gentle and loving disposition, as well as a similarity in their tastes and habits, had drawn not only Erasmus, but also the other members of the little band, consisting of Colet, Grocyn, and Linacre, irresistibly towards him.

Erasmus seems to have spent the Christmas vacation of 1499-1500 at Woodstock, or some royal hunting station. His feelings in regard to this part of his life are well described in an amusing letter which he wrote to a friend at Paris:—"As for your friend Erasmus," he said, "you would hardly know him. He is almost grown a good hunter, a better horseman, a very tolerable courtier. He can salute with more complaisance, he can smile with a better grace, and

* Op., tom. iii. p. 456, C., edit. Lugd.

† The story told of their first meeting, when Erasmus, captivated with More's conversation, exclaimed, "*Aut tu es Morus, aut nullus*;" to which More replied, "*Aut tu Erasmus es, aut diabolus*," is commonly supposed to be without foundation.

has learned all these manners in spite of nature." An invitation is given to his friend to come to England to partake of these singular advantages of this country, which are preferable to the dulness and rudeness of France. He tells him that nothing but the gout could stop him, and that if he only knew the excellences of Britain he would procure wings, if he had no feet, and fly over hither without any further delay, especially if he told him of the nymphs, or fair ladies, here so beautiful, so fair, and so easy, that if he saw them he would prefer them to his beloved muses. He adds, that there is a custom peculiar to this country, never to be enough admired, that men and women salute one another and kiss with the most innocent freedom at visiting, parting, meeting again, and again taking leave; and that if he did come over and taste these pleasures he would here desire to spend the whole remainder of his life. "We will jest out the rest," he says, "when we meet. I shall see you, I hope, in a very little time."*

Erasmus, however, soon found that these pursuits and pleasures, though they might amuse him for a time, were not really congenial to his inclinations, and must not be permitted to interrupt the solemn business of life. He was now pursuing learning for its own sake, that he might add to the vast stores of knowledge which he had already acquired. Colet had hoped that he would aid him in exposing the sophistry of the schoolmen, and that he would lecture on some book of the Old Testament, that he might assist him in imbuing the minds of the students at Oxford with those sound views of scriptural truth, the heartfelt reception of which could alone make them wise, and happy, and useful in this world, and prepare them for the enjoyment of the immortality beyond it. He well knew that his great intellectual powers peculiarly qualified him to deal

* Op., tom. iii., p. 222., edit. Bas.

with this subject. They had often held discussions on theological questions. The result of them had been that Erasmus began to see the absurdity of the system in which he had been trained; but he was not yet prepared to do battle with the schoolmen. He thought that he might sustain an ignominious defeat if he endeavoured to smite down those foes before his weapons were properly sharpened, or he was sufficiently skilled in the use of them. The announcement which he now made to Colet that he must shortly leave Oxford, greatly disappointed him. He had indulged the hope that, sustained by the sympathy and ready help of Erasmus, his drooping courage would be revived, and he should be able to do valiantly in the conflict with his formidable antagonists. But now these expectations were in vain. Erasmus, however, assured him that though he was not at hand to aid him in his conflict, he would endeavour to further his studies, and by his written words to nerve the arm and animate the heart of this valiant champion of the truth. He made to him a promise which, as we shall see hereafter, he fulfilled, that when he had obtained the requisite strength, he would openly place himself on his side, and aid him in beating back the foes confederate against him.

Having given him this assurance, Erasmus took his departure from Oxford in the year 1500. On the 27th of January, he left for Dover, from which place he proposed to embark for the Continent.

CHAPTER III.

RETURN TO THE CONTINENT.—JOHN VITRARIUS.—THE
ADAGES.—THE ENCHIRIDION.—A.D. 1500—1505.

ERASMUS, on his arrival at Dover, met with a great misfortune. It appears that Henry VII., reviving an obsolete statute, had forbidden the exportation of gold coin from the realm. The custom-house officers made use of it as a pretext for searching him, and for depriving him of the golden crowns with which he had been enriched by the bounty of his friends before his departure from England.

This loss appears to have made a great impression on him. In an epistle to his friend Pace, written about twenty years after this time, when he was speaking of his *Commentaries*, which he was afraid that he had lost, he says that they gave him as much concern as his misfortune at Dover, where he had lost his all.* The immediate consequence of this loss was that he was obliged to abandon the idea of proceeding to Italy, and to work hard at Paris that he might procure the means of subsistence. He now worked at his collection of "*Adages or Proverbial Sayings of the Ancients*," partly with the design just referred to, partly that he might improve himself in the Greek language. The prevalence of the plague at Paris drove him first of all to

* *Op.*, tom. iii. p. 454, edit. Bas.

Orleans, and then to Holland. He could not, as he informs us, endure the long and substantial repasts of the inhabitants, their devotion to gain, and their insensibility to literature.* He afterwards returned to France, and took up his abode at Tournahens, the residence, as we have seen, of the Marchioness of Vere, and her friend Battus, her tutor. He here wrote, in the year 1501, his famous *Enchiridion*, which I shall presently describe.

One of the excursions from Paris which he made after this time was to the Low Countries. When Prince Philip returned from Spain, the States of Brabant asked Erasmus to pronounce a panegyric upon him. With great reluctance he undertook to do so. "I foresaw," he writes to Colet, "that such a thing could not be done without adulation." He spoke it in the palace at Brussels on the 6th of January, 1504, in the presence of nearly all the nobility. His address gave great satisfaction. Erasmus received congratulations upon it from every part of Europe. Philip gave him fifty pieces of gold, and offered him a place in his palace. Erasmus, however, declined it.

The following passage from the panegyric shows the partiality of Erasmus for Paris:—"This city has advantages, one even of which it is difficult to find in most towns—a flourishing clergy, an almost unrivalled school, a senate as venerable as Areopagus, as celebrated as the Amphictyonic, as illustrious as the ancient senate of Rome. By their happy assistance the greatest blessings are united in their city—enlightened religion, profound learning, and the administration of justice. The clergy are learned; the learned are pious; and both learning and piety are united in the senators."†

* He called Holland "Beer and Butter Land."—Müller, p. 232.

† The title of this address is the following: "The panegyric addressed by Desiderius Erasmus, in the name of the whole country, to

It was while he was staying with his friend the marchioness that he became acquainted with John Vitarius, the recluse monk of St. Omer, of whose character he has given a beautiful and eloquent description in a letter to his friend, Justus Jonas.* He always joined together the names of Colet and Vitarius, as men remarkable for their love of Evangelical truth and for their personal holiness. He showed him his *Enchiridion*, and obtained his approval of the work.† The following extract from the letter just referred to exhibits to us, among other features in his character, the zeal with which he denounced the vices of the clergy and the corruptions of the Church of Rome:—

“Vitarius was nearly forty-four years old when I became acquainted with him. Immediately he began to form an attachment to me, though a man very unlike himself. He had much influence with many excellent men, and was very popular with many persons of high rank. He was tall, had an elegant person, was remarkable for his talents, and possessed an elevated mind. When he was a boy he made himself acquainted with the works of the Scotists. He did not altogether condemn them, as there were to be found in them some good things badly expressed; but yet he had not an exalted opinion of them. He admired no one who wrote religious works more than Origen. When I told him that I was surprised that he should approve of the writings of a heretic, he answered, with great energy, that he could not imagine that a mind from which had proceeded so many works, remarkable for their learning, and

the most illustrious Prince Philip of Burgundy, on the subject of his triumphal departure to Spain and his happy return.”—*Op.*, tom. iv. p. 397, edit. Bas.

* *Op.*, tom. iii. p. 451, edit. Lugd.

† *Catalogus Lucubrationum* præfixus, *Op.* tom. primo. Eras. Joanni Botzhemo, edit. Bas.

exhibiting so much fervour, was not influenced by the Holy Spirit.

“Though he by no means approved of that mode of life into which, in the ignorance of youth, he had entered of his own accord, or been enticed by others, constantly telling me that it was the life rather of madmen than of those who were truly religious, to go to sleep, to awake, to go to sleep again, to speak, to be silent, to go, to return, to take, or to abstain from food at the sound of the bell,—in a word, to do everything, rather according to the commandments of men than according to the rule of Christ, and that nothing was more unjust than the equality among so many who were really unequal, chiefly because often heavenly minds, and minds framed for better things, were buried beneath the weight of ceremonies and human ordinances, or were lost through the envy of others around them; yet he never recommended any one to change his mode of life, and he did not himself design anything of the kind, being prepared rather to endure everything than to give offence to any one, proposing St. Paul as an example to himself in this matter. He had studied so carefully the sacred books, especially the Epistles of St. Paul, that no one knew better his nails and fingers, than he the writings of that apostle. If you gave him the beginning of any part, he would tell you the whole of the remainder of the Epistle without a single mistake. He could say from memory many parts of St. Ambrose. You would scarcely believe how much of the works of other orthodox writers he knew by heart. For this advantage he was indebted partly to the retentiveness of his memory, partly to continual study. When I asked him, as we were conversing together, what preparation he made for preaching, he answered that he usually took up St. Paul’s Epistles, and continued to read them till he found a flame kindled in his breast. In this meditation he persevered,

adding, besides, burning words of prayer, till he was reminded that it was time to begin. He did not make divisions in his sermons—a plan so much adopted by preachers that you would fancy that they might not act otherwise; thus the division is often without meaning. It also lessens the fervour of the discourse; for, by showing art, it makes you think that the preacher is insincere. But Vittrarius, by making his sermon flow on continuously, so joined the sacred Epistle with the reading of the Gospel, that his hearers went home, not only instructed, but with a zeal for true religion. He did not, like so many preachers, trifle with his hearers by gesticulations, nor did he deafen them by shouting, but he so spoke that you might at once see that his words proceeded from a glowing, and simple, but from a sober heart. He did not at any time linger so long on his theme as to cause weariness, nor did he with much pomp cite various authorities—now referring his readers to Scotus, now to Thomas, now to Durandus, or to the works on the civil or canon law, that the multitude might think highly of his knowledge. His discourse was full of Holy Scripture, nor could he speak of anything else. His heart was in his subject. He was influenced by a burning desire of drawing men to the true philosophy of Christ, such as you could hardly believe to exist.

“After labours of this kind, he was ambitious of the glory of martyrdom. As I have learnt from his intimate friends, he had obtained permission from the heads of his fraternity to visit those regions in which Christ is not known, or is worshipped in an impious manner, thinking that he should be happy if, when he came there, he should win the martyr’s crown. But as he was in the middle of his journey, he heard, as it were, a voice from heaven which said, ‘Return, John, you shall suffer martyrdom in your own country.’ He obeyed the voice, and found that what it had

told him was true. There was a house in which the religious life had so decayed, that it seemed more like a brothel than a nunnery. And yet amongst its inmates were some who could be, and who wished to be, reformed. While by frequent addresses and exhortations he was recalling them to Christ, eight of the number, who were past all hope of recovery, conspired against him, and having watched their opportunity, dragged him apart, and having bound him with handkerchiefs, attempted to strangle him. Nor did they desist, till some by chance coming in, interrupted them in the commission of their abominable crime. He was at this time half dead, and was with difficulty recalled to 'life ; yet he never made any complaint even to those whom he accounted his intimate friends, and he still did everything in his usual manner to help forward the work of their salvation. Even when he looked at them, his countenance did not wear a more sorrowful expression than heretofore. He knew very well who was the chief conspirator. He was a Dominican divine, a man who openly led a very wicked life. Yet he never harmed him even by a word, although he was angry with no class of men more than with those who, professing themselves to be the teachers of, and the guides to, true religion, alienated the people from Christ by their life and wicked teaching.

“Occasionally he preached seven times a day, and he never wanted an abundance of matter for a learned sermon when he had occasion to speak about Christ. Yet the whole of his life was nothing more than an eloquent sermon. So far from being reserved, he was cheerful in company ; but yet there was never in him the least appearance of levity or of trifling, far less of excess or of intemperance. He interlarded his conversation with learned observations, for the most part of a sacred character, and tending to the advancement of piety. Such was his conversation when he

received or returned a visit. If he went on a journey, his great friends sometimes lent him a mule or a horse, that he might the more easily hold a conversation with them. Then this most excellent man uttered in a cheerful manner words which no jewels could purchase. He sent away no one from him sorrowing, or who was not the better for having been with him, or who was not inflamed with a greater love for piety. You would never find him consulting his own interest. He was not obnoxious to the charge of gluttony, ambition, avarice, pleasure, hatred, envy, or of indulging any other evil affection. In everything he gave thanks to God, and he had no greater pleasure than to find that he had been successful in inflaming men with a love for evangelical piety. His efforts were not in vain. He won many men and women to Christ, whose death clearly showed how much they differed from the common herd of the people. You would see his disciples dying with the greatest joy, and on the approach of death singing like swans, speaking in a manner which clearly showed that they were the subjects of a divine influence ; while others, trusting in the religious rites which they had observed, and in the solemn protestations which they had made, breathed out their souls in uncertainty.

“ Ghibertus, an excellent physician of the town, and a very pious man, who has been present at the death-beds of many of both schools, can bear witness to the truth of the preceding assertions. . . . The very pure soul of Vittrarius had an utter abhorrence of all vices, but especially of lust, and was truly a temple dedicated to Christ. He was greatly offended with the least reference to this last vice, and could not endure obscene language. He never spoke against vice in a manner which showed anger or hatred, and never disclosed the secrets of the confessional ; but he painted such a picture of virtue, that every one in the secret recesses of his

heart knew whether or no it was a faithful likeness of himself. In giving advice he showed wonderful wisdom, integrity, and judgment.

“He was not very willing to hear private confessions ; but yet, in this matter also, he observed the law of Christian charity. . . . He openly expressed his dislike of anxious and repeated confessions. He attached very little importance to superstitious rites and ceremonies. He ate in moderation, and with thanksgiving, certain kinds of food. His clothing did not differ at all from that of other men. Often, on account of his health, he went on a journey whenever he found himself unwell. One day, when he was going through his allotted exercise of morning prayer with his companion, and was suffering from sickness arising from the want of food the day before, entering the nearest house, he took some food, and, before continuing his journey, began to pray. When his companion thought that he must say over all his prayers from the beginning, because he had taken food after saying the prayers assigned to the first hour, he cheerfully replied, that no sin had been committed, nay, that God would be a gainer. ‘Before,’ he said, ‘we prayed with languor and heaviness ; now, with joyful minds, we shall sing to Him spiritual hymns ; and He is always pleased with those offerings which come from a cheerful giver.’ I happened at that time to be staying with Antonius a Bergis, the Abbot of St. Bertin. We did not usually dine till after the middle of the day, and my stomach could not bear for so long the want of food (for it was Lent), especially as my mind was wholly given to my studies. Accordingly, it was my practice before dinner to fortify myself with a little warm broth, that I might not suffer from the pangs of hunger before the dinner-hour arrived. When I asked him whether it was lawful for me to do so, he, looking at the lay companion whom he had with him, and being careful not to

give him offence, replied, 'You would have done wrong if you had not done so, and by the want of food hindered yourself from prosecuting your sacred studies, and injured your health.'

"When Pope Alexander had appointed two jubilees instead of one, in order that he might increase his gains, and the Bishop of Tournay had, at his own risk, purchased the indulgence from him, the commissaries used every effort that he might not be a loser, but rather a gainer by the transaction. Here, in the first place, those were called to act their part, who were the most popular preachers. Vittrarius, seeing that money which was applied to the relief of the poor, was thrown into the box, did not disapprove of what the pope offered, and yet he did not approve of it. But certainly he was displeased because the poor were deprived of their usual relief; he condemned the foolish confidence of those who thought that when they had thrown their money into the box their sins would be pardoned. At length the commissaries made a present of 100 florins towards the erection of the church which was then being built in the convent, so that if he could not recommend the pope's pardons, he might at least say nothing about the injurious effect of them. But, as it were divinely inspired, he exclaimed, 'Away, ye Simonists, with your money. Do you suppose that I am a man who, for money, will suppress evangelical truth? If thus I put an end to your gains, I ought to have more regard for souls than for your profit.' The men, whose consciences told them that they were doing wrong, drew back when they heard these strong words addressed to them by one whose heart was under the influence of evangelical truth. Contrary, however, to expectation, very early in the morning, a sentence of excommunication was affixed to the walls, which was taken down by a citizen before it became known to many. He, not at all terrified

by these threats, with the greatest calmness taught the people, and devoted himself to the service of his Saviour, not fearing any anathema which was hurled against him for preaching Christ.

“You will now be glad to hear what became of him afterwards. He not only displeased the commissaries, but also some of the brethren, not because they disapproved of his manner of life, but because it was better than they liked it to be. He was altogether intent upon winning souls ; but in the culinary department, in building, or in drawing rich young men into the monastery, he was not so active as they wished him to be. Still this most excellent man did not neglect matters of this kind ; but if anything were required for the relief of the wants of others, he did not follow the example of many, but paid very great attention to them. . . . When, from living in the same place with him, one after another grew up, who, under the influence of a similar spirit, sought rather to promote Christian piety than to fill their larder, they banished him to a small convent at Courtray. There, as far as he was allowed to do so, still like himself, teaching, consoling, and exhorting, he ended his life in peace, leaving behind him some little books in French, the fruit of his scriptural studies, which, I doubt not, are such as were his conversation and manner of life. And yet I know that he is now condemned by some who think that there is great danger if the people read anything besides the trifling stories of history, or the dreams of the monks. A spark of his doctrine still lives in the breasts of many. If you compare them with others, you will say that the latter are not Christians, but Jews. In such contempt that remarkable man was held by his own body. If he had been the colleague of the Apostle Paul, I do not doubt that he would have preferred him to Barnabas or Timothy. You have now before you our paragon, Vitarius, unknown to

the world, but distinguished and illustrious in the kingdom of Christ."

Notwithstanding the kindness of the friends lately referred to, often, in the years from 1501 to 1505, Erasmus gave way to despondency. It had now become the settled purpose of his life to separate himself as far as possible from secular, and to apply himself to Scripture studies. "I struggle," he wrote to Colet, "to devote myself to the study of sacred literature: I hate everything which detains me from it." All his pursuits were considered by him as important only so far as they were subservient to the attainment of that end. But constant ill fortune had hitherto attended his efforts. Those years had been passed in a constant struggle with poverty. He had been obliged to engage in literary work which, as he says, "had ceased to be pleasant to him," that he might procure the means of subsistence and of prosecuting his studies. He says that he should purchase first Greek authors, next clothes. He complains that want of money hindered him from finishing some treatises, because it forced him to spend much of his time in reading lectures to young students. But he persevered in his self-allotted task. He had laboured for three years at Greek, because he considered that without it he could do nothing in any branch of study. He had endeavoured to master the Hebrew tongue, but had failed in doing so, in all probability, from the want of proper instruction.* Thus, then, this poor student had worked on in failing health, amid difficulties which would have daunted the courage of an ordinary man, animated with the single desire of serving God faithfully, and doing good in his day and generation, by preparing himself to devote, as we shall see hereafter, the powers with which He had gifted him to the investigation and defence

* Op., tom. iii. p. 351, edit. Bas.

of Christian truth, as well as to its propagation throughout the continent of Europe.

The first edition of the *Adages* was printed at Paris in 1500. It consisted of 800 proverbs, and was dedicated to Lord Mountjoy, having been designed to aid him in his studies. It seems to have been compiled in a few days, during his intervals of leisure from more important occupations. In the year 1508 he published a second edition of this work, because, as he says in a letter to Colet, the first was imperfectly executed by him, and badly printed.* During the time which had elapsed since the publication of the first edition, he had been engaged in collecting a great number of adages. He had obtained many of them from various friends, who kindly lent him their manuscripts. This work is a monument of the extent of his reading, of his great industry, and of his profound erudition. In it he traces to their origin all the strange sayings in the classic writers. It was received with great applause. We stand amazed when we contemplate that ardour in the pursuit of learning which led him, at a time when many classical works existed only in manuscript, and were scattered in various parts of Europe, to persevere until he had collected at first 3200 proverbs, and afterwards more than 4000, having searched for them with that care which was necessary—since, as he says in his proverb, “*Herculei labores,*†” “the labours of Hercules,” “adages, because they are very small, sometimes escape the eyes which look most closely for them,”—as well in those more obscure classical writers whose names even have been scarcely known to the learned of succeeding generations, as in the writings of every one of those poets, orators, philosophers, and historians of ancient Greece and Rome, who

* *Op.*, tom. iii. p. 352, edit. Bas.

† *Op.*, tom. ii. p. 707 C., sqq., edit. Lugd.

have erected for themselves in them a durable monument.

This work contains, not only those which may be more strictly denominated proverbs, but also most of the remarkable sayings or phrases in the works of the ancients. We find, on an examination of it, that the sayings and proverbs—"Use is a second nature;" "One swallow does not make a summer" (which he interprets to mean that one day is not sufficient to acquire virtue or learning); "Let the cobbler stick to his last;" "While there is life there is hope;" "To have one foot in the grave;" together with many more of a similar kind which are constantly used amongst us, were used also in the streets of Athens and Rome in the days of those mighty monarchs who have moulded the taste and genius of mankind in every succeeding age of the world's history. When the work had been improved by alterations and additions, it became the best key to classical authors of any in that age. The Greek quotations were afterwards carefully translated into Latin, so that many would find assistance from it in the study of the former language.

But unquestionably the most interesting part of the work contains those digressions introduced in later editions, in which he animadverts in the strongest terms on the vices, follies, and crimes of popes, monarchs, statesmen, monks, and people, in the age in which he lived. Thus, in writing on the proverb, "*Scarabeus aquilam quærit*;"* or, "The beetle pursues the eagle," he compares the monarchs of his day to the king of birds in his threatening and terrible shriek—an appropriate symbol of those imperious mandates which spread terror among all ranks of human society, so that they crouch in vassalage before them; in his determination to seek a larger space for his depredations, and not to suffer any other robber in the neighbourhood—a fit representation of

* Op., tom. ii. p. 869 A., sqq., edit. Lugd.

that lust of conquest which leads human eagles to aim continually at the extension of the boundaries of their empire, or the limits within which they have a right to plunder; and in his eyes, which are sharper than those of the lynx, and can gaze steadfastly on the sun when shining in his meridian splendour—thus reminding us of those numerous officials, whose watchful eyes can discover everything even when hidden in the most secret places, which may serve as food for the cravings of their master's insatiable appetite.

Again, in the proverb, "*Sileni Alcibiadis*,"* he first shows that, just as the unprepossessing images of Silenus, the foster-father of Bacchus, seen in ancient Greece, to which Alcibiades compared Socrates, when the outside was removed, disclosed the features of a god to the astonished and delighted view, so many things and persons which appear to be mean and insignificant are really worthy of our highest admiration; and then he proceeds to present a reverse to the picture, and to show that appearances are deceitful also as to many objects and classes of men which appear beautiful, and deserving of all the praise which we can bestow upon them. "If you look, for instance, at the mitres of some of our bishops, glittering with gold and with gems, their jewelled pastoral staff, and all their mystic panoply, you would expect to find them more than men; but if you open the Silenus, you will find within only a soldier, a trader, or a tyrant. Take again the case of those whom you may meet with everywhere. If you look at their shaggy beard, their pale face, their cowl, their bent heads, their girdle, their sour looks, you would say that they were remarkable for their piety; but if you look inside the Silenus, you will find only rogues, gluttons, impostors, debauchees, robbers, and tyrants." . . . A similar mistake is made as to names. "We call," he says, "priests, bishops, and popes the Church, al-

* *Op.*, tom. ii. p. 770 C., sqq., edit. Lugd.

though they are only ministers of the Church ; for the Church is the whole Christian people. And of the Church we say that she appears in honour and splendour, not when piety is increased and vice is diminished, when good morals are prevalent and true doctrine flourishes, but when the altars are embellished with gold and jewels ; or rather when, religion being totally neglected, the prelates rival temporal lords in lands, domestics, in luxury, in mules, in horses, in houses, or rather in palaces, in everything that makes a show and a noise. This is thought so just a manner of thinking and speaking, that even in papal bulls these encomiums may be found : ‘ Forasmuch as Cardinal A., by his sumptuous equipage, and numerous train of horses and domestics, does singular honour to the Church of Christ, we think it right to add to his preferments another bishopric.’ ”

He afterwards proceeds by an obvious and easy transition to speak against the wealth and temporal power of the Pope. He says that, while he wishes that priests should reign, he considers that earthly dominion is unworthy of the heavenly calling ; that while he desires that they should be rich, it must be with the gospel pearl, with the heavenly riches. “ Why,” he says, “ should you sully their purity with the defilements of the world ? Why do you estimate the successor of Peter by that wealth which Peter himself boasts that he does not possess ?* Why do you wish the vicars of Christ to be entangled with the riches which Christ Himself has called thorns ?”† He then proceeds to show that an ecclesiastical government must be greatly prejudicial to the welfare of its subjects. One of the reasons which he assigns is, that as the Popes know from their advanced age that their tenure of power must be short, and that their dominions cannot descend to their posterity, they will labour chiefly for the aggrandizement of their families,

* Acts iii. 6.

† Matt. xiii. 22.

and the promotion of their own private interests, and will create offices for their relations which will absorb the revenues of the state. Thus, then, Erasmus describes that system of management which, continued through successive ages, had, like the deadly night-shade, shed a pestilential blight over the land. Thus, even while speaking of ancient literature, he lost no opportunity of censuring those corruptions which had now become intensified to a degree beyond the possibility of human endurance.

From some letters written about this time it appears that he intended to publish the works of St. Jerome, and that he was quite delighted with this father, whom he greatly extols ; and in a sort of ecstasy promises himself the assistance of the saint in this laborious undertaking.* He published in 1503 his justly celebrated "Enchiridion," to which reference has been already made. Erasmus has informed us of the occasion on which he composed this book, in a letter to Botzhem, containing a catalogue of his works.† He and Battus had a friend staying in the castle of Tournahens at the time mentioned above, who had a wife of singular piety. He was a man of very bad character, and treated his wife with great inhumanity. As she saw that Erasmus was the only theologian for whom he had the least respect, she asked Battus to request him to write something which might be the means of effecting a reformation in him. He was not, however, to inform him that he had done so at her instigation. Erasmus at once complied with his request, and wrote the "Enchiridion, the Christian Soldier's Dagger, or Manual,"‡ a name probably derived from the military

* Jortin's "Life of Eras.," vol. i. p. 17.

† Eras. Epist. Botzhemmo, given in Jortin's "Life of Eras.," vol. ii. p. 428.

‡ He gives this meaning in the following words, Op., tom. v. p. 10, edit. Bas. : "As you would doubtless be glad of help from us we

profession of the man for whose benefit it was intended. Unfortunately it did not produce the desired effect upon him. He said that there was much more holiness in the book than in the author. At first it had no sale. The Dominicans, however, afterwards increased the circulation of it by raising a clamour against it. They were very angry with Erasmus, because he condemned those who made religion consist in the performance of outward rites and ceremonies, while they altogether denied the power of godliness. We are informed that in the library of the Dominicans of St. John and St. Paul at Venice, there are two rows of wooden statues, one of the Roman Catholic, the other of the heretical doctors. Among the latter stands Erasmus, loaded with chains, and covered with labels full of reproaches against him, as also against Luther and Calvin; but those who were more moderate were content to represent him as suspended between heaven and hell.*

The best proof that the "Enchiridion" was considered as a means of aiding the progress of the Reformation, is to be found in the fact, that while at first it had a limited circulation, no sooner had Luther begun his work than it became a favourite with his followers, and passed through numerous editions. It was translated into Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English. The translation into the last language was made by the celebrated Tyndale. It was afterwards re-issued in an abridged form by Coverdale. It was read in Spain even by the Emperor Charles V., as well as by all orders of the community.† The printers could not print it quickly enough to meet the demand for it.‡ It

have forged an 'Enchiridion,' or Little Dagger, which you should not lay down, even at your meals, or during your sleeping hours."

* Jortin's "Life of Erasmus," vol. ii. p. 67.

† Vives Erasmo, Op., tom. iii. p. 538., edit. Bas.

‡ Joannes Maldonatus Erasmo, Op., tom. iii. p. 715, edit. Lugd.

afterwards ceased to be popular in Spain, because it was found to promote the progress of the Reformation ; and it was condemned by the Sorbonne in 1543, and was burnt by order of the Parliament of Paris, with many other prohibited books.

An examination of this celebrated work will enable us to see clearly the position which Erasmus occupied from the very first with reference to the great questions which were shortly to agitate Christendom.* We shall thus discover hereafter that he never swerved from the opinions expressed on points of doctrine at the beginning of his memorable career. We can easily see how this work must have aided the Reformation. To this point we shall return in a future chapter. Meanwhile we may observe, that very little importance is attached in it to the distinctive views of Romanists. He condemned the folly of those who hoped by pilgrimages, or by “parchments sealed with wax, or by a small sum of money, to be purified from their guilt ;”† he insists on the worthlessness of all outward observances, and acts of piety and charity, when the heart and life are unholy ; he reminds the Romanists of his day that they “must not consider how many psalms they murmur, nor think that much speaking is a merit in prayer ;” and that it is not the prayer uttered with the lips, but the ardent one from the heart, which reaches the ears of God.‡

But while we admit that by the expression of these opinions he promoted the progress of the Reformation, we may gather from this work that he did not hold those which Luther and his associates considered to be the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. He does, indeed, allude to Adam’s transgression, and to our redemption by Christ Jesus ; but he does not make these truths the foundation of

* Op., tom. v. p. 1, sqq., edit. Bas.

† P. 32.

‡ P. 7.

his system. He does not hold with Luther that man is averse from good, and inclined only to evil ; and that he has naturally neither the power nor the inclination to enter on the path of holy obedience. On the contrary, he maintains that “ the soul, mindful of its heavenly birth, with the greatest energy mounts upwards and strives with its earthly incumbrance.”* He also says that “ in man reason discharges the duties of a king ; that divine counsellor presiding in its lofty citadel, mindful of its origin, does not admit a thought of baseness nor impurity.”† We shall find that he held the same view many years afterwards, when we speak of his treatise on the freedom of the will. He does indeed teach us that “ faith is the only gate to Christ ;”‡ but then he also states that those “ go straight to Christ who aim at virtue only,” and that by Christ he understands “ not an unmeaning word, but love, singleness, patience, purity ;”§ in short, all those virtues and excellences which most dignify and adorn human nature. In fact we see here, as we shall see more particularly hereafter, that his great object is to inculcate the practical part of Christianity. The faith here spoken of has reference, not to the Saviour’s righteousness, but to God’s promises and threatenings as they are brought before us in the Scriptures ; to the “ far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” reserved for the righteous in the mansions of the blessed, and to the never-ending misery which awaits the impenitent in the regions of despair. We learn also from this treatise that he held the meritoriousness of good works ; for, speaking of the sorrows and difficulties of the Christian, he says, “ These all will be added to the sum of your merits, if they shall find you in the way of Christ ;”|| and that he could not accept that doctrine of justification by faith in Christ’s

* P. 12.

† P. 13.

‡ P. 19.

§ P. 22.

|| P. 21.

righteousness, which Luther calls the article of a standing or falling church.

While we notice this divergence from the views of the reformers, we cannot fail to observe that this treatise is remarkable for the spirit of piety which breathes throughout it, and that it contains some important practical precepts. He represents, for instance, in the following striking and beautiful passage, prayer and knowledge as the weapons to be wielded by us if we would conquer in that terrible conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, which all the sworn soldiers of the cross must maintain as long as they continue in the tabernacle of the flesh: "Paul wishes us to be armed when he tells us to pray without ceasing. The devout prayer raises the affections to Heaven, a citadel inaccessible to our enemies. . . . Always, therefore, remember, as soon as the enemy assails you, when the sins which you have forsaken tempt you, to lift up your heart with confidence to Heaven, from whence succour will come to you. . . . But you must not despise the assistance of knowledge. Believe me, my dearest brother, that there is no assault of the enemy, however violent, no temptation, however strong, which a diligent study of the Scriptures cannot enable you to overcome; no affliction, however heavy, which it cannot give you strength to endure."* But still it is perfectly evident that he holds that this victory over the Tempter, the diligent endeavour also to walk in the path of virtue, and to exhibit a transcript, however faint, of those excellences which shone forth with unimpaired and undiminished brightness in the all-perfect character of our divine Master, are the only means by which we can obtain that imperishable reward which shall be conferred on all those who have been faithful unto death on the great day of the Redeemer's appearing.

* Pp. 6, 7.

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND VISIT TO ENGLAND.—JOURNEY TO ITALY.—DESCRIPTION OF GERMAN INNS—RETURN TO ENGLAND.—THE “PRAISE OF FOLLY.”—A.D. 1505—1510.

AT the close of 1505 Erasmus again paid a visit to England. He was received with open arms by his little band of Oxford friends, and took up his abode at More's house.

He was at this time the greatest Transalpine scholar. Budæus surpassed him in Greek, but he had no rival in Latin. Just before his departure from Paris he had given a plain proof that he was continuing his Biblical studies by bringing out an edition of Laurentius Valla's “Annotations upon the New Testament,” in a letter prefixed to which he boldly expressed the opinion that the Vulgate was manifestly at fault, and ought to be corrected.* He seemed, however, after his arrival in England, not to be very eager about theological literature. We find him busily engaged with his friend More in translating Lucian into Latin.†

* Eras. C. Fischero, Op., tom. iii. p. 190, edit. Bas.

† Some of the private friends, referred to afterwards, to whom he dedicated parts of the work, were Archbishop Warham; Dr. Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester; Thomas Ruthall, afterwards Bishop of Durham; and Christopher Ursewick, for many years chaplain to Henry VII. To the first he dedicated several pieces; to the second “Toxaris, or Friendship;” to the third “Timon, or the Misanthropist;” to the fourth the “Mycillus.”

We might almost imagine that More had diverted his thoughts from that which he considered at present to be the great business of his life; for he persuaded him to write at the same time with himself, in order to exercise their skill, a declamation in Latin against Lucian's "Pro Tyrannicidâ." Erasmus sent his part, with a dedication, to a friend, Richard Whitford, chaplain to Lord Mountjoy, telling him that having been for some years wholly occupied with the study of the Greek language, he had attempted a little Essay in Latin, by the advice or impulse of Mr. More, a man of so much eloquence that he could persuade even an enemy to do anything for him, much more a friend like Erasmus, who loved him so much that if he were to direct him to dance, or to do anything else, he should immediately obey him. He adds, "He has a tongue equal to his wit, a very agreeable manner, a great deal of smartness, but yet on the candid and inoffensive side only, so that nothing is wanting to make him the best advocate in the present age."*

But Erasmus was really prosecuting his design with an unfaltering purpose. He had long felt that, before he could translate the New Testament into Latin, he must improve himself in Greek. He says, in a letter written some years after he left Oxford, that he had determined to devote himself to theological studies, and, had attempted to write an explanation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, but that he had been obliged to abandon his design for the present, as he could do nothing without the Greek language.† In early life he had not learnt any more of it than the alphabet.‡ He had, indeed, as we have seen,

* Op., tom. i. p. 228, edit. Bas.

† Epist. Coletto, Op., tom. iii. p. 351, edit. Bas.

‡ Epist. Antonio a Bergis, Abbate S. Bertini, Op., tom. iii. p. 325, edit. Bas.

studied it at Oxford ; but still we find that he had brought away little more than a love of the language from that University. From a letter to his friend Battus we learn that he had applied himself very diligently to Greek at Paris ; that his hard work had almost killed him ; and that he had no money to buy books, or to employ a master.* We are also informed that he had made very little progress in it in that city, and that he had been his own master, having improved himself by translating Greek authors ; for the Professor, George Hermonymus, was neither able nor willing to teach it.† He had therefore resolved, when he arrived in England, to translate Lucian, in the sale of which he endeavoured to interest private friends by dedicating portions of the work to them, as well as to engage in other occupations which served to withdraw him from sacred duties, not only that he might improve himself in Greek, but also that he might raise money enough to enable him to carry out a design which, as we have seen, he had been compelled to abandon, and to pay a visit to Italy, where he hoped to be instructed in Greek by some of those emigrants who, after the fall of Constantinople, were unfolding the beauties of its authors to the astonished and delighted view of the inhabitants of that country.

He also in other ways endeavoured to raise money for the accomplishment of his object. He gives an amusing account of a visit which he paid to Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, for that purpose. This was the beginning of their acquaintance. The latter seems to have received him very kindly, to have invited him to dinner, and to have had some conversation with him. Erasmus presented to him a Latin translation of the *Hecuba* of Euripides, which he had dedicated to him. On rising to take leave, Warham made him a

* Eras. Epist. Batto suo. Knight's Life.

† Eras. *Catalogus operum ab ipso conscriptus*, Tom. primo præfixus. Edit. Bas.

present in money, but privately, in order, as he said, that he might not excite the envy of others. While he was returning in the boat from Lambeth Palace with Grocyn, who had introduced him to the archbishop, his friend asked him how much he had given him. Erasmus answered in a jesting tone, "An immense sum." Observing a smile on Grocyn's countenance, he said, "Do you think that the Archbishop has so mean a spirit that he should not be willing, or so small an income that he should not be able, to make me a handsome present? or do you think that the book deserves no great acknowledgment?" At last he told him what Warham had really given to him. On expressing his surprise that he had not given him more, Grocyn told him that the reason was that the archbishop thought that he had dedicated the work to some other patron in another country. Having been asked how he could imagine that he had done so, he answered in a tone of derision, "Why, you are accustomed to do so;" meaning that needy travellers often acted in this manner.*

Erasmus appears to have spent some months of the spring of 1506 with his friends in this country. He now found that, through their kindness, he could at length pay his long-wished-for visit to Italy. An arrangement was made that he should take with him as his companions two sons of Doctor Baptista, physician to Henry VIII. He was also to have under his care Alexander, Archbishop of St. Andrews, natural son to James, King of Scotland. He found him pursuing his studies at Padua. Both in that city, and afterwards when they met at Sienna, he took charge of his instruction. In his "Adages" he has given a high character of him, and in his Treatise "de Conscribendis Epistolis,"

* *Erasmi Catalogus Lucubrationum, præfixus Op. tom. primo.*
Eras. Joanni Botzhemo. Edit. Bas.

he calls him “a young man of genius and of great promise.”* He was a student of rhetoric, Greek, law, divinity, music; remarkable for his beauty, and of an amiable disposition. On his return to Scotland, he was slain by his father’s side at the battle of Flodden Field.† Erasmus hoped, by taking charge of these pupils, to pay his travelling expenses. Thus he left England and proceeded on his journey, having, before his departure from Paris, expressed an earnest hope in his letters to his friends that he should soon return, never more to be separated from them.

On his way to Italy, Erasmus passed through Germany, accompanied by those who had been placed under his care. They were gentle youths, and easily managed; but their attendant, who looked after their conduct, was rude and troublesome. The connection soon terminated. As to his experience of men and manners at the German inns where he lodged every night after his toilsome journey on horseback, Erasmus was indebted for many of the ideas which he has worked out in his remarkable satire, “The Praise of Folly,” it may be well to give a translation of a Latin conversation respecting them in his Colloquy, “Diversoria.”‡ The persons who converse are Bertulphus and Gulielmus:—

Gu.—I have never visited Germany: I should be much obliged to you therefore to inform me how the inhabitants receive a guest.

Ber.—I do not know whether they have everywhere the same way of entertaining visitors; I will tell you what I have seen myself. No one bids his guests welcome, lest he should

* Op. tom. i. p. 313. Edit. Bas. “Adolescens ingeniosus, miræque spei.”

† “Jortin’s Life,” vol. i. p. 292.

‡ Op. tom. i. p. 603, edit. Bas.

seem to want them to come to the inn ; for they consider such a proceeding mean, and not becoming to the German gravity. When you have called for a long time, at length some one puts his head out of the oven window (for they commonly live in ovens till Midsummer), like a tortoise from under its shell. Him you must ask if you can have accommodation there. If he does not say no, you are to understand that you can have it. When you ask where the stable is, he points to it. There you must groom your own horse in your own way, for not a servant will stir to help you. If the inn should be one of note, the servant will show you the stable ; but you will not find in it proper accommodation for your horse. The best stalls are kept for future visitors, especially for the nobility. If you make any objection, you are immediately told that you may go to another inn. In the cities you get hay with great difficulty, and in very small quantities, and as much is charged for it as for oats. When you have taken care of your horse, you may go to a room heated like an oven, along with boots, baggage, and filth. That is the place to which all must go.

Gu.—In France they show you bedchambers, where you may take off your clothes, make yourself clean, warm yourself, or rest if you like.

Ber.—Here you find nothing of the kind. In the room just mentioned you take off your boots, you put on your shoes, you change your shirt if you wish to do so, you hang up your dripping garments near the fire, you come to it to dry yourself. You can have water there if you wish to wash your hands, but very often it is so dirty that you must ask for some more to wash away what it leaves behind it.

Gu.—I think well of men who are not effeminate.

Ber.—If you arrive at four o'clock in the afternoon, you will not have your supper till nine, sometimes not till ten.

Gu.—Why so ?

Ber.—They will get nothing ready till they see all their visitors. The same trouble must do for all.

Gu.—They gain by this way of managing matters.

Ber.—Yes. In the same oven are often assembled eighty or ninety footmen, riders, merchants, sailors, coachmen, husbandmen, children, women, sick, and sound.

Gu.—This is having all things common.

Ber.—There one combs his hair, another wipes away the sweat from his skin, another cleans his shoes or boots, another spits out garlic. In short, there is the same confusion of tongues and of persons there as there was formerly in the building of Babel. * If they see a foreigner, whose deportment shows him to be a man of quality, all keep their eyes fixed upon him, looking at him as if he were a new kind of strange animal brought from Africa; and when they are set at table, and he behind them, they will still be looking back at him and staring at him till they have forgotten their supper. It is a great sin to ask for anything. When it is late in the evening, and no more guests are expected, an old servant, of a forbidding aspect, with a white beard, with his hair cut short, and in mean apparel, comes in. He looks round, and counts to himself the number in the oven. The more there are, the hotter the oven is made. If any one not accustomed to the steam should open the window ever so little, fearing suffocation, immediately he hears him crying out, "Shut it." If you say that you cannot bear it, you are told to go to another inn. . . . Presently in comes our bearded Ganymede, and covers the tables with as many napkins as there are guests; not damask ones, but such as you would take to be made out of old sails. He places at least eight at each table. Those who know the custom of the country sit down where they please; for no difference is made between prince and peasant, between master and servant. When all have taken their seats, that sour-looking Gany-

mede again comes in, and counts his company over again. Soon returning, he puts before each a wooden dish, and a spoon of the same silver, and then a glass, and then, a little afterwards, some bread, which the guests may wipe over and over again at their leisure while the porridge is boiling. Thus sometimes they sit for nearly an hour.

Gu.—Do none of the guests in the meantime call out for food?

Ber.—No one who knows the custom of the country. Then the wine is produced—words cannot describe its sourness. If any one should offer money privately, and should ask for another sort of wine, they at first deny that they have it, looking at him all the time as if they would kill him; if you press them for it, they answer, “Marquises and counts have lodged here, and no one has complained of my wine: if you do not like it, go to another inn.” Then, as the guests are very hungry, hunches of bread are given to them. Afterwards, with great pomp, come the dishes. Commonly the first contains pieces of bread steeped in broth made of flesh, or, if it is a fish day, in soup made of pulse. Afterwards comes in another soup, and then a dish of butcher’s meat that has been twice boiled, or salt meats warmed again, and then pulse again, and afterwards some more solid food. Then, when the cravings of hunger are satisfied, they bring some roast meat or stewed fish, not altogether to be despised, but in small quantities, and these dishes are soon taken away. You give great offence if you say, “Take away this dish, no one wants it.” You must sit for the time appointed, which is measured by an hour-glass. Afterwards a better wine is produced. Great drinkers have the best of it; for he who drinks much pays no more than he who drinks scarcely any.

Gu.—Who ever heard of such a thing!

Ber.—Some drink a quantity of wine that costs more

than twice as much as their supper. You would be astonished if you heard the confusion when they have become somewhat the worse for liquor. Buffoons, that most detestable set of men, often mingle with the company. You will perhaps scarcely believe me when I tell you that the Germans are very partial to them. They sing, chatter, shout, jump, and knock, so that you would fancy that the room was going to fall in. You cannot hear what any one says to you. They think this a pleasant way of living ; and you must sit, whether you wish it or not, till late at night. . . . At length, when the cheese is taken away, which scarcely pleases them unless it be putrid and full of maggots, the bearded fellow of whom I have spoken comes in again, carrying a trencher, marked with circles and semi-circles in chalk, which he places on the table. He says nothing, and looks so grim that you might fancy him to be Charon. Those who understand the meaning of this put down their money one after another till the trencher is full. Having taken notice of those who lay down, he reckons it up himself, and if all be paid, he gives you a nod.

Gu.—But what if there should be anything over and above ?

Ber.—Perhaps he will give it you again ; and they sometimes do.

Gu.—Does no one find fault with the reckoning ?

Ber.—No one that is wise ; for they will at once say, “ What sort of a man are you ? You pay no more than the rest.”

Gu.—That is plain speaking, at any rate.

Ber.—If any one tired with his journey wishes to go to bed after supper, he is told that he must wait till the others are ready to do so. Then each is shown to his bed-chamber ; and in truth it is rightly so named, for there is only a bed in it, and nothing else which you can use or steal. There

is the same dirt in it as in the inn ; the sheets were washed perhaps six months ago.

Gu.—What in the meantime becomes of the horses ?

Ber.—They are treated in the same manner as the men.

Gu.—Are all the inns the same ?

Ber.—Some are better, some are worse than those which I have described, but this is the general character of them. . .

Thus, then, this sickly scholar, who needed to be well fed and well tended, was treated on his journey to Italy. Though he was not more than forty years old, he already felt, in consequence of hard work, the infirmities of old age creeping upon him, as he complains in a beautiful Latin poem, forming a contrast in regard to beauty to his other poems, addressed to William Cope, a physician, which he composed on horseback as he was crossing the Alps.* He afterwards wrote it out at the inn where he stopped for the night. He says that his head is sprinkled with gray hairs, and that his chin, fast becoming white, warns him that the spring-time of life has passed away, and that the winter of old age is rapidly approaching.

Soon after his arrival in Italy he took the degree of Doctor of Divinity at the University of Turin, where he resided for some weeks. He then went to Bologna. He had hardly arrived when the city was besieged by Pope Julius, of whose warlike enterprises, and their effect on his mind, I shall speak hereafter. He then went to Florence, and returned to Bologna to see the triumphal entry of the pope into the city. He constantly expressed afterwards his strong disapproval of the pomp exhibited by the head of the Roman Catholic Church on that occasion. Here he remained rather more than a year, with the exception of a short visit to Rome in the spring of 1507.

In the beginning of 1508 he proceeded to Venice to superin-

* *Op. tom. iv. p. 755, edit. Lugd.*

tend the printing of a third edition of his "Adages," at which he had been working for some time, by the celebrated printer, Aldus. Here he occupied the same room with Aleander, afterwards the uncompromising opponent of Luther and the Reformation, of whom I shall speak in a future chapter. His friendship for Erasmus was, as we shall see hereafter, changed into bitter enmity. Here, for nine months, he was engaged in incessant labour. He passed the winter at Padua, as I have said, with his pupil, the Archbishop of St. Andrew's, from which place he moved with him to Sienna. He went to Rome in the spring of 1509, and there was warmly welcomed. The pope promised him at some future time a place among his penitentiaries, usually considered a post of much honour and emolument. He was also introduced to the Cardinal de Medici, afterwards Leo X., and formed other friendships which were of service to him. "He was taken into the protection of Raphael, Cardinal of St. George, and at his persuasion was put upon a very ungrateful task, to declaim backwards and forwards on the same argument; first to dissuade from undertaking a war against the Venetians, and then to exhort to the said war upon the pope's' changing his holy mind."* The second declamation was obviously very discreditable to him.

While he was at Bologna he very nearly lost his life. I shall give his own account of what happened to him, extracted from the letter to Grunnius, containing the history of his early life which has been given in the second chapter of this work.† "Some time afterwards the love of study induced him to go to a foreign country. According to the custom of the French, he wore a white linen scapulary over

* Knight's "Life of Erasmus," p. 105.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 919, edit. Bas.

his dress, thinking that it was not unusual to do so there. But twice he was in danger of losing his life, because surgeons who attend people stricken with the plague wear a white linen scarf over their left shoulder, which hangs down in front and behind, that they may be easily seen, and may be avoided by all who meet and who follow them. If they did not walk through deserted streets, the people would run together and would stone them. . . : Once when Florentius happened to be visiting a learned friend, two officers whom he met, drawing their swords, and using words which showed their murderous intentions, would have slain him, if a matron, who was fortunately passing by, had not told them that it was not the dress of a surgeon, but of an ecclesiastic. They did not, however, desist from shouting after him, and did not return their swords to their scabbards till he had knocked at the door of a neighbouring house, and had been admitted inside it.

“Another day he was going to see some friends who belonged to his own country, when suddenly a large crowd assembled, armed with stones and clubs, who, in a transport of rage, shouted out to one another, ‘Kill the dog! kill the dog!’ In the meantime he met a priest, who, with a smile, said to him in a low tone, and in Latin, ‘Asses! asses!’ While they were making this outcry, presently a very elegant young man, in a purple cloak, came out of a house. Florentius fled to him as to an altar; for he was altogether ignorant of the language of the country, and wondered what they wanted. ‘Let me tell you,’ he said, ‘that if you do not leave off that white badge you will some day be stoned to death. Mind what I say; I give you fair warning!’ He did not leave it off, but covered it with his robe! Good God! what a tragedy was likely to arise from no cause whatever!”

This incident was assigned as one reason for the applica-

tion addressed to the pope to release him from his monastic vows. The pope to whom Grunnius presented the epistle was not Julius II., but Leo. X. Erasmus says in this epistle that he had before obtained of the pope (that is, of Julius II.) leave to accommodate his habit to the custom of the places where he should sojourn.* Here then we have the conclusion of the romantic story in the second chapter. It ended in an appeal to the pope, which was successful, that he might change the habit of a friar for that of a secular priest.

The following amusing story of his introduction to Cardinal Dominic Grimani will show the estimation in which he was held at Rome.† The cardinal had sent him word that he should be glad to see him. He called one afternoon, and having left his horse with the servant, went in alone. He walked through two or three rooms without seeing any one. At length, in the fourth room he met a Greek who asked him his business. On telling him that he had called at the request of the cardinal, he was informed that he was conversing with some gentlemen. Erasmus said immediately that he would not disturb him, and that he would shortly call again. He then went to look out at a window. "At last," to use his own words, "he asked me my name, and I told him, upon which he slipped away unperceived by me, and, returning, desired me not to go. In a minute after I was called in. The cardinal received me, not as such a one as he might have received a person of my low station, but as though I had been one of his colleagues. He ordered me a chair, and we conversed together for more than two hours, nor would he suffer me to be uncovered—a surprising civility from a man of his dignity! Amongst several things relating to learning, in which he showed great skill, he gave

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 625.

† Ibid. p. 29.

me an account of an intention to collect a library, which I hear he has since executed. He exhorted me not to leave Rome, a place where men of genius were encouraged. He offered me his own house, and told me that the air of Rome, being warm and moist, would suit my constitution, that his residence was situated in the most healthy part of the city, and that a certain pope had on that account built the palace in which he lived. After much conversation he called in his nephew, who was already an archbishop, and was of a promising genius. As I offered to rise, the cardinal would not let me, and said that the disciple ought to stand in the presence of his master. Then he showed me his library, well stored with authors of different languages. Had I known him sooner, I should never have quitted Rome, where I found more favour than I deserved; but I was then determined to go, and it was not in my power to stay."

The fact was that Erasmus felt that he could not take up his abode in Italy. He states, in a letter to a friend, that a land of ceremonies and a land of inquisition was no proper habitation for a man of a temper so open and free.* He had another reason for not caring to stay in Italy. He had come to it, as he writes to Servatius, chiefly to perfect himself in the Greek language; but he had been unsuccessful on account of the wars which prevailed in that country.† By his own account, too, of Pope Julius, he seems to have found so little sincerity at Rome that he was little inclined to remain in that city. He and his cardinals thought only of political intrigue and of warlike operations, and cared nothing about religion or literature. He has made, as we shall see presently, the ambition and military spirit of Julius the subject of his satire in the "Praise of Folly." Impressed with the conviction just referred to, he seems to have considered as

* Jortin's "Life of Erasmus," vol. i. p. 31.

† Knight's "Life of Erasmus," p. 89.

a providential call an invitation to return to England sent to him by Lord Mountjoy, dated May 27th, 1497 (a manifest error for 1509). He was led to expect great favours from Henry VIII., who had just ascended the throne. When he asked a friend at Rome if he should accept the invitation, and whether the papal court would make him higher offers, he was told that he could not be encouraged to stay, as there was very little probability that his merits would be rewarded. Accordingly he accepted the proposal, and travelling back by the same route by which he came, returned to England between the autumn of 1509 and June, 1510.

But though the visit of Erasmus to Italy was not directly serviceable to him in regard to the enlargement of his knowledge of the Greek language, yet in another way it produced important consequences. It led to the composition of that remarkable satire, "*Μαγία Εγκώμιον*," or the "Praise of Folly," which, by its lively and stinging exhibition of the absurdities and vices of many of the ecclesiastics of the Church of Rome, may be considered as having directly aided the cause of the Reformation.* This work is one of the most remarkable satires the world has ever seen. It is full of wit, and embodies his views of men and manners formed not only in the course of his travels, but also during his residence in Italy. As it was the rule of his life never to lose any time, and as he would not, as he says in the Introduction, give his mind to abstruse meditations while he was riding across the country on horseback, he employed himself in meditating this work, and wrote down his thoughts at the inn at the end of the day's journey. The Greek title was derived from the name of his friend More, to whom he dedicated it. He called it so, not because he was *that* which this word expresses, for he was, in the judgment of all men, as far removed from it as possible, but be-

* Op. tom. iv. p.352, edit. Bas.

cause he was fond of a joke, and took delight in any production which was seasoned with real wit. It appears to have been finished in a week, soon after his return to England, at More's house, in Bucklersbury, London, when he was ill, and could not apply himself closely to his studies. He anticipates a charge which might be brought against it, that the work was of too trifling a character for a theologian, and was too sarcastic for a Christian. He asks why the student alone of all men should not be allowed to amuse himself in this manner, especially when what he says has a serious tendency, and he so handles his humorous subject that the reader shall derive more benefit from it than from a heavy discourse worked out in a very argumentative manner. "For as you certainly lay yourself open to the charge of trifling when you treat of sacred subjects in a trifling spirit, so nothing tends more to edification than, even when you are writing in a vein of pleasant humour, not to seem to have been trifling at all. To the charge of stinging sarcasm I make this answer, that men of genius have always been allowed to be witty about any transactions of life, provided they keep within the bounds of moderation. For the religion of some is of so absurd a character, that they can bear to hear evil words spoken against Christ, but object to the least raillery directed against the pope or a king. He who censures the conduct of the world without mentioning any one by name, seems to me rather to teach and to warn than to bite by his sarcasm. Besides, he who spares no class is clearly angry, not with any one individual, but with sin in general. So if any one should complain that he is reflected upon, he will show that he is conscious that he deserves censure, or at least that he is afraid of it. Besides abstaining altogether from giving names, I have so tempered my style that the wise reader will easily understand that I have endeavoured to give pleasure rather than pain."

Folly is then represented as giving an address to her followers. She begins by enumerating the benefits which she everywhere confers. She then speaks of the universality of her worship.*

“The whole world is my very beautiful temple. I have worshippers wherever the human race is to be found. I am not so foolish as to be adored by proxy, and to have my honour bestowed intermediately on senseless images and pictures, which are sometimes injurious to worship, when ignorant people make no distinction between the things themselves and the objects which they represent. In the meantime custom does for me what it usually does for those who find their place usurped by their representatives. I think that there are as many statues erected to me as there are men in the world who, even against their will, carry my image stamped on their countenances. I have therefore no reason to envy the other gods, because one is worshipped in one corner of the world, another in another, and that too on stated days—as Apollo at Rhodes, Venus in Cyprus, Juno at Argos, Minerva at Athens, Jupiter on Olympus, Neptune at Tarentum, Priapus at Lampsacus—when the whole world is my altar, on which the most valuable incense and sacrifice are continually offered up. As I may seem to some to speak with greater boldness than truth, I will ask you to examine with me the lives of men, that you may plainly see how much they owe to me, and how much the least as well as the greatest value me. We will not review the lives of all, for that would be a tedious task, but only of the principal classes, from whom we may easily form an opinion of the others.” . . .

After having shown by several instances how much she contributes to the enjoyment of life, she speaks of those whose minds, by a harmless mistake in the judgment of things, are freed from those cares which would otherwise afflict them,

and possess a satisfaction which they could not otherwise enjoy. She mentions, by way of illustration, those who look down with contempt on every occupation except hunting, and who “find the greatest pleasure in hearing the sound of horns, and the barking of dogs.”* Folly is then represented as saying, “How great is their delight when a wild beast is to be killed! The common people may kill bulls and sheep; it is a crime for any one but a nobleman to kill the animal just mentioned. He, with bare head, with bent knees, with a hanger designed for the purpose (for a common knife is not good enough), and with certain ceremonies (for it is a sin to do it in any way but one), cuts certain limbs in a certain order. The crowd standing round silently gazes in wonder, as if at a new and sacred spectacle, although they have seen it more than a thousand times before. He who tastes a small portion of the flesh fancies that he has become a nobleman. Thus while with this continual slaughter of these animals and feasting on them, they almost become wild beasts themselves, they think that they are leading a life truly royal.”

Folly afterwards gives the following description of the gambler†:—“I have a little doubt whether the gamblers ought to be admitted to our college. But yet it seems to me very ridiculous to see some so addicted to this amusement, that as soon as they hear the sound of the dice, their hearts begin to beat. When, led on by the hope of winning, they have made shipwreck of all their property, and their ship is dashed on the rock of a game of hazard, far more to be dreaded than the rock of Malea, assuredly they must be considered as utterly wanting in wisdom. What shall we say when we see old men playing when they can scarcely see, and their eyes are beginning to be glazed? or what of those who, when the gout deprives them of the use of their fingers, pay a

* Page 368.

† Page 368.

man to put the dice for them into the dice-box? A pleasant occupation, truly! but with this drawback, that the game often leads to madness, and so belongs rather to the Furies than to me."

She thus continues: "But I have not the least doubt that those are altogether my votaries, who delight in hearing or relating miracles and prodigious lies. They are never wearied of fables about spectres, ghosts, and apparitions, and a thousand bugbears of superstition of the same kind, which are readily believed and greedily devoured in proportion as they are wanting in truth and probability. And these serve not only to beguile their tedium, but also are a source of gain, especially to priests, and to those who can by their speaking influence the multitude. Near of kin to these men are those who are foolish enough to believe that they shall not die on the day on which they have seen a painted or wooden St. Christopher, or that they shall return safely from battle when they have mumbled once a prayer before the picture of St. Barbara, or that they shall shortly become rich when on certain days they have placed before an Erasmus certain wax-tapers, or addressed to him certain prayers. They have found in St. George another Hercules as well as another Hippolytus. They almost worship his horse, after they have most religiously adorned it with trappings and with bridles full of bosses. What shall I say of those who derive very great comfort from the cheat of pardons and indulgences, and who measure the spaces of purgatory as if with an hour-glass, marking, without the possibility of error, the ages, the years, the months, the days, the hours, as if from a mathematical table; or of those who relying on certain magical charms or short prayers which some religious impostor has invented for the purpose of gain, promise themselves everything—wealth, honour, pleasure, excess, constant health, a long life, a green old

age, last of all the next place to Christ in heaven, which, however, they do not wish to obtain for some time to come, that is when they shall exchange the pleasures of this life which they are unwilling to resign, and hold with a tenacious grasp, for the delights of the heavenly paradise? You could hardly suppose it to be true that some merchant, or soldier, or judge, having cast down a small piece of money taken from the vast amount he has gained unjustly, thinks that all the guilt of his life is purged away, and that he has purchased the pardon of so many perjuries, so much lust, so much drunkenness, so many quarrels, so many murders, so much cheating, so many acts of treachery, and so purchased it that he may now return afresh to a new circle of wickedness.

“Can anything exceed the folly of those who, after the daily recitation of the well-known seven verses of the sacred psalms, hope to rise to the summit of human felicity? those magic verses, I mean, which a certain facetious demon, more shallow than crafty, skilfully surprised by St. Bernard is believed to have taught him? Several of these fooleries which are so absurd that I am almost ashamed to refer to them, yet are practised and admired not only by the common people, but also by professors of religion. Similar to this is the folly which leads every country to claim its particular Guardian Saint, and to assign certain offices, certain modes of worship, to every one of them, so that one gives relief to the tooth-ache, another assists in child-birth, another restores stolen property, another aids in shipwreck, another guards the flock. But it would be tedious to go through the offices of all of them. Some there are who have prayers addressed to them on all occasions, especially the Virgin Mary, to whom the common people attribute more power than they do to her Son. Now from these Saints what, I say, do men ask, excepting those things which relate to folly? . . .

Amongst the numerous trophies with which, as tokens of gratitude, you see the walls, the brazen gates, and the roof itself of certain churches covered, have you ever seen any from one who has been cured of folly, and has made progress in true wisdom? They are such as these. One is grateful because, after a shipwreck, he has swum safely to land; another, because, after having been stabbed by an enemy, he has recovered; another, because, when all his fellow-soldiers were killed on the spot, he, with equal cunning and cowardice, escaped from the field; another, because, after having been hanged on a gibbet, by the favour of some saint who was friendly to thieves, he has fallen, and has been able to follow his old trade of stealing; another, because he has escaped from prison; another, because his waggon was overturned, and yet none of his horses were lamed. . . . No one gives thanks for having been preserved from folly. So agreeable is it to be unwise that men will rather pray against anything than folly. But why do I launch out into so wide a sea of superstitions?—

‘No, had I e’en a hundred tongues,
A hundred mouths, and iron lungs,
All folly’s forms I could not show,
Nor go through all her names below.’”*

* * * *

Folly next refers to those “who have the reputation of wisdom, and endeavour, as men say, to obtain her golden bough.”† After having lashed them most unmercifully, as well as poets and rhetoricians, she speaks of those who seek immortality by writing books,‡ whom she describes as men

* Non mihi si linguae centum sint, oraue centum,
Ferrea vox, omnes fatuorum evolvere formas,
Omnia stultitiæ percurrere nomina possim.

Altered from Virgil, *Aeneid*, book vi. lines 625-627.

† Page 371.

‡ Page 374.

“never satisfied with themselves, and as purchasing a useless reward, the praise of a very few, at the cost of so much midnight oil, with the loss of sleep, nature’s sweet restorer, with so much labour, with so many vexations. You may add to these evils the loss of health, the weakening of their constitution, dimness of sight or even blindness, poverty, envy, the loss of worldly pleasures, premature old age, untimely death, together with many other troubles of a similar description. But how much happier in his madness is that author, my devoted servant, who, without any trouble, and at the cost of a very little paper, immediately commits to writing whatever comes into his mind, not forgetting even his dreams, being fully assured that the more nonsense he talks, the higher will be the place which he will occupy in the good opinion of the majority, that is of the foolish and the unlearned! These men are happy indeed when they are commended by the common people, when they are pointed out in a crowd, when their works are exhibited at the booksellers’ shops. Wise men look upon all this as very ridiculous. True, but yet it must be admitted that to me they owe their present happiness, and the triumphs which they would not exchange for those of the Scipios.”

After having ridiculed the lawyers and the logicians, Folly thus describes the philosophers:* “With what pleasure to themselves do they rave while they talk of the creation of countless worlds, while they measure out the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, as it were by the thumb or thread, while they explain the cause of thunder, the origin of winds, the nature of eclipses, and other abstruse difficulties without the least hesitation, just as if they had been initiated into the mysteries of creation, or as if they had come to us from the council-chamber of nature, at whom

and at whose conjectures nature in the meantime loudly laughs. For it is perfectly evident to us that they have made no discovery when we find that an interminable controversy is carried on between them respecting everything. While they really know nothing at all, they lay claim to universal knowledge."

Folly then proceeds to speak of the theologians, whom she says it would perhaps be better to pass over in silence.* "They are a race at once proud and irritable, and will perhaps attack me in a body with their six hundred conclusions, and call on me to recant. If I refuse to do so, they will at once cry out that I am a heretic; for with these thunders they terrify all who offend them. . . . It is true that no men own less dependence on me; yet to me they have reason to acknowledge themselves largely indebted. For it is by one of my properties, self-love, that they fancy themselves caught up to the third heaven, from whence they look down with contempt upon the whole human race as if they were cattle creeping on the ground, whom they affect to pity. They are hedged in with so great a crowd of definitions, delivered with the authority of a master, of conclusions, of corollaries, propositions explicit and implicit, that if you bind them with the strongest chains, they will escape from you with their distinctions, by means of which they cut all knots as easily as if they struck them with a two-edged axe. They explain in their own manner hidden mysteries; how the world was created and arranged; through what channels the pollution of Adam's sin came down to all his posterity; in what manner, with what measure, in what time, Christ was formed in the Virgin's womb; how, in the sacred elements, accidents can subsist without a substance. . . . They ask these questions—Whether it is possible for the Father to hate the Son? Whether God can take upon Himself the

* Page 375. Here refer to the second chapter.

nature of a woman, a devil, an ass, a gourd, or a flintstone? How the gourd could have taught publicly, worked miracles, and have been nailed to the cross? What Peter would have consecrated, if he had consecrated when Christ was hanging on the cross? Whether at that time Christ could have been said to be a man? Whether after the resurrection we shall eat or drink, feel hunger or thirst? . . . These very perplexing subtleties are rendered still more perplexing by the methods of the schoolmen, so that you can more easily find your way out of a labyrinth, than escape from the entanglements of the Realists, the Nominalists, the Thomists, the Albertists, the Occamists, the Scotists, who constitute the leading sects. These men possess so much learning, so much subtlety, that I think even the Apostles themselves would want another Spirit, if they were compelled to engage in controversy with this new race of divines. Paul could believe; but when he said, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,' he did not (they assert) define it with sufficient accuracy. He was full of charity; but he was not (they say) very correct in his explanation of it in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. . . . The Apostles knew the mother of Jesus; but which of them has shown philosophically, as our divines, how she was preserved from the stain of original sin? . . . They baptized everywhere, and yet they have nowhere taught what is the formal, the material, the efficient, and the final cause of baptism; they do not speak of its delible or indelible character. They worshipped, but in spirit, guided by those words of our Lord, 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'* But it does not appear to have been revealed to them that they must worship, in the same manner as Christ

* 1 John iv. 24.

Himself, 'a little image marked with a coal on the wall, having two fingers held out, a bald crown, and a circle round its head with three marks on it. . . . Again, the Apostles exhort to good works, but they make no distinction between the *opus operans* and the *opus operatum*. They everywhere inculcate charity; but they do not distinguish between charity infused and charity acquired, and do not explain whether it is an accident or a substance, whether it is a created thing or an uncreated. They express their hatred of sin; but I am positive that they could not define dogmatically what we call sin, unless indeed they possess the inspiration of the Scotists. For I cannot be brought to believe that Paul, of whose learning all have a high opinion, would so often have condemned 'foolish questions, genealogies, and contentions,' and, as he calls them, 'strivings about the law,' if he had been skilled in these subtleties.* : . .

"I think that the Christians would be wise if, instead of those cohorts who formerly fought with doubtful success, they were to send the very noisy Scotists, and the very obstinate Occamists, and the invincible Albertists, together with the whole band of sophists, against the Turks and the Saracens. They would witness, I fancy, a most amusing conflict, and a victory on our side not to be questioned. For which of the enemy would not lower their turbans at so solemn an appearance? which of the fiercest Janizaries would not throw away his cimeter, and all the half-moons be eclipsed by the interposition of so glorious an army?

"You may think that all this is said in joke; but in truth there are some amongst the theologians better instructed, who are disgusted with these frivolous subtleties. Some condemn it as a kind of sacrilege, and look upon it as the greatest impiety, to speak with unclean lips concerning

* Titus iii. 9.

mysteries which ought rather to be the subject of a humble and uncontradicting faith than of an inquisitive reason ; to argue respecting them with the profane subtlety of the heathen philosophers, to define them with so much presumption, and to pollute the majesty of divine theology with cold and mean words and thoughts. But alas ! these scholastic divines are very well satisfied with themselves, and spend the day and night over their very delightful studies, so that they have no time left to meditate on the gospels, or on the epistles of St. Paul. While they thus trifle in the schools, they think that they shall support the whole fabric of the Church, which would otherwise fall, with the props of their syllogisms, as Atlas in the poets supports the heaven on his shoulders. They are supremely happy while they form and re-form at their pleasure the letters of the Bible as if they were made of wax, while they would have their conclusions, to which some schoolmen have given their consent, ratified as the laws of Solon, and preferred to the decrees of the Pope ; and while, setting themselves up as censors of the world, they call for a recantation of every thing which does not exactly square with their explicit and implicit conclusions, declaring as if with an oracular voice, ‘This proposition is scandalous,’ ‘This savours of heresy,’ ‘This is irreverent,’ ‘This is very improper.’ . . . Are they not the happiest of men, while they are treating of these things ? while they exactly describe everything in the infernal regions, as if they had passed many years in that kingdom ? making besides new spheres at their pleasure, one, the largest and most beautiful, being finally added, lest there should not be sufficient room for happy souls to walk about, to enjoy a banquet, or even to play at ball ?* With

* He here alludes to the tenth, or “empyrean sphere,” which the schoolmen had added to the ninth sphere of the ancients.

these and a thousand trifles of the same kind their heads are so stuffed and swelled, that I do not think that the brain of Jupiter was so heavy, when, as he was bringing forth Pallas, he asked for the axe of Vulcan to ease him of his burden. You must not therefore be surprised, if you see their heads so carefully surrounded with bandages in their public disputations, for otherwise they would certainly burst asunder." . . .

Erasmus, by this severe condemnation of the schoolmen, fulfilled the promise which he had made to Colet, that when he had the requisite strength, he would openly oppose them.*

Folly then inveighs in the following bitter words against the follies and vices of the monks:† "These men call themselves religious men and monks. Both titles are, however, altogether undeserved; for they are as irreligious as they well can be; and as to the latter title, the etymology of the word 'monk' implies 'being alone;' whereas they are so thickly abroad that we cannot pass any street or alley without meeting them. Now I cannot imagine what class of men would be more hopelessly wretched if I did not stand their friend, and buoy them up in that lake of misery in which, by the engagements of a holy vow, they have voluntarily plunged. While men of this class are so execrated by every one that the casual meeting of them is considered a bad omen, I yet cause them to stand very high in their own estimation, and to be fond admirers of their own happiness. First, they think that they give a very plain proof of their piety by having nothing to do with learning, so that they can scarcely ever read. Next, while in their churches they bray out like asses the psalms which they count indeed, but do not understand, they think that God listens well-pleased to their melody. Some there are

* See end of chap. ii.

† Page 377.

who make much by their filth and begging, bellowing for bread in front of our doors, and crowding in upon us everywhere, in public-houses, in waggons, and passage-boats, not without great loss to other beggars. These very delightful men, who are remarkable only for their dirt, their ignorance, their clownish manners, and their impudence, pretend that they are the genuine successors of the Apostles. What gives them greater pleasure than to regulate their actions by weight and measure, as if their religion depended on the omission of the least point? They state exactly how many knots their sandals should have, of how many different colours each of their garments should consist, of what material they should be made, what ought to be the length and width of their girdle, how deep their cowl should be, how many hours they must sleep, at what minute rise to prayers, &c. . . . These men who profess to be influenced by apostolical love often engage in quarrels respecting the darker colour of a robe, or girding it on the wrong way, or any similar nicety not worth mentioning. . . . Some who shrink from touching money, as if it were poison, will not abstain from wine or from carnal intercourse with women. They all seem to be firmly determined that there shall be no agreement in their customs and habits. They strive not so much to be like Christ, as to be unlike one another. A great part of their happiness consists in the names which they assume. Some will be called Cordeliers, and these are subdivided into Capuchins, Minors, Minims, and Mendicants. Some again are styled Benedictines, others of the order of St. Bernard, others of that of St. Bridget; some are Augustine monks, some Willielmites, and others Jacobites, as if the name of Christian were too mean and vulgar. Many of them make salvation depend upon their ceremonies, and upon a belief of their traditions, thinking that one heaven can scarcely be an adequate reward for their

great merit, not remembering that Christ will despise all claims of this kind, and will ask them whether they have exactly observed the law of love which He has given to them. One will show his paunch stuffed with every kind of fish; another will exhibit a hundred measures of psalms; another will number up myriads of fasts; another will bring forward a heap of ceremonies, which can scarcely be conveyed in ten merchant ships; another will boast that for sixty years he has never touched money, excepting with fingers protected by a pair of gloves; another will produce a cowl so dirty and coarse, that no sailor would think it good enough for him; another will declare that for more than fifty years he has lived the life of a plant, always rooted to the same place; another will plead as his claim the loss of his voice from constant singing; another, the lethargy occasioned by solitude; another the loss of the power of speech from long silence. But Christ will interrupt them in the recital of their good deeds, which would otherwise never come to an end, and will say, Whence comes this new race of Jews? I acknowledge one law as really mine, of which I hear nothing. Formerly, when on earth, without a parable, I promised my Father's inheritance, not to austerities, prayers, or fastings, but to faith and the offices of charity. I do not acknowledge those who make much of their good deeds. Those who trust in their own merit may inhabit, if they please, the new heavens of the schoolmen, or they may order a new heaven to be erected for them by those whose traditions they have preferred to my precepts, for they shall never enter into that, which from the beginning of the world was prepared for those who are true of heart. When they hear these words, and see sailors and carters preferred to themselves, what looks do you suppose they will cast at one another? But

in the meantime they are greatly indebted to me for their present expectations of happiness.

“No one dares to despise these men, especially the Mendicants, though they have nothing to do with public affairs, because they know the secrets of every one, which they obtain through the confessional. They think it, however, very wicked to divulge them, and never do so unless, when they are intoxicated, they wish to amuse themselves with pleasant tales; but they carefully conceal the names, and leave people to form a conjecture as to the persons. If any one should irritate these wasps, they avenge themselves well in public by insinuations against their enemy, which every one but an idiot can perfectly understand. The dogs will not leave off barking till you have thrown them a sop. What player, what mountebank would you not rather see than these men, when they make a very ridiculous display of their rhetorical artifices in their public addresses, while they derive the greatest pleasure from following the rules which the masters of the art have laid down respecting the right method of speaking. How they gesticulate! How careful they are to change their voice in the right place! How they modulate it! Into what various attitudes they throw themselves! How well they change the expression of their countenance! What a confusion they make by their shouting! This art of speaking is transmitted as a great mystery from brother to brother. You see, then, I think, how much these men are indebted to me, who, by their ceremonies, their ridiculous trifles, and their noise, exercise a kind of tyranny over mankind. But I willingly leave these actors, who are as ungrateful in their concealment of their obligations to me, as they are wicked in making a pretence of piety.”

Folly then proceeds to censure, in severe terms, the vices

and follies of the kings and courtiers of those days. She then attacks the dignitaries of the Church.*

“Popes, Cardinals, and Bishops,” she says, “have, in pomp and splendour, long since equalled, nay almost surpassed, secular princes. If they will carefully consider that the snow-white linen vestment reminds them that they must live a spotless life; that the forked mitres with both divisions tied together by the same knot, denote the joint knowledge of the Old and New Testament; that their wearing of gloves reminds them that they must keep their hands pure from lucre and covetousness; that their pastoral staff is intended to impress upon them the importance of looking very carefully after the flock committed to their charge; that the cross carried before them reminds them that they must gain a victory over their carnal affections;—if, I say, they would only consider these things, and many more of a similar nature, would they not see that they are entrusted with an important and difficult office? But now they live luxuriously, and commit the charge of the flock to Christ Himself. . . . They forget altogether what their name of Bishop imports; namely, labour and watchful care; and, by base simoniacal contracts, are, in a profane sense, *Episcopi*, Overseers of their own gain and income.

“The Cardinals, in the same manner, would do well to remember that they have come into the place of the Apostles; that therefore they must conduct themselves like their predecessors, and so not be ‘lords over God’s heritage,’ but ‘dispensers of spiritual gifts,’ and that they will be called on hereafter to give an exact account of the manner in which they have improved the talents with which He has gifted them. If they will for a short time meditate on their dress, and learn lessons from it, they will ask themselves the following questions:—‘What am I taught by this white

upper garment?—That I must be remarkable for innocency of life. What by the inner purple robe?—Burning love to God. What, again, by the outer pall with its many folds and windings, which is spread over the whole of my mule, and would be quite large enough to cover a camel?—Charity, which extends very far and succours everybody, which teaches, exhorts, consoles, rebukes, admonishes, puts an end to differences, courageously resists wicked princes, and willingly sacrifices not only its money, but even its life for the flock of Christ. Let me ask myself again, Ought a successor of the poor Apostles to possess all this wealth? If they weighed these things well, they would not be ambitious of this dignity, and would willingly resign it, or at least would live a watchful and laborious life, like the disciples of their Lord and Master.”

Folly then lashes severely the Popes themselves. The student of history will at once see that he is here describing two Popes, his contemporaries, who filled a large space in the annals of infamy. I have already spoken of Alexander VI.* Julius II., who was alive at the time when Erasmus wrote the “Praise of Folly,” was haughty and intractable, restless and ambitious. He devoted all his energies to the enlargement of the territory of the Church, and the complete subjugation of the barons who had resisted the authority of his predecessor. He heard a voice in every wind animating him to carry his warlike enterprise to a successful issue. That voice scared sleep from his eyes and slumber from his eyelids. At length it was heard and answered. The tumult of the battle-field was music in his ears. At the siege of Mirandola he was continually in front of his soldiers, rebuking some, and animating all to deeds of noble daring. At length he subdued his barons, and added a large tract of fertile territory to the patrimony of St. Peter. We

* Page 36.

cannot doubt, however, that the ambition and wars of Julius, while they issued in the extension of the Church's territory, were greatly injurious to the Papacy. They were fit subjects for the satire of Folly. Men could not fail to lose all reverence for their spiritual guides when they saw their ambition no longer veiled under the decent pretext of an apparently honest determination to redress the wrongs of human society, but exhibiting its workings in all the petty artifices of politics, in dissimulation and perjury, or in the coarser form of military enterprises, conducted by themselves, having for their object to gain possession of the territory of their neighbours, and to raise themselves as temporal princes to a high place among this world's potentates.

Folly thus describes the Popes:—"If the sovereign Pontiffs, who are Christ's vicegerents, were to endeavour to imitate His exemplary life, His poverty, His labours, His teaching, His sufferings, His contempt of the world; if they were to think of the word Pope, which signifies a father, and conveys the idea of the greatest possible sanctity; or if they would but practise that holiness which they assume as their title, what class of men would be in a worse condition? Would any purchase that dignity with all the wealth at their disposal, or defend themselves by the dagger, by poison, by every kind of violence? How much of their pleasure would they lose if they had a grain of wisdom—wisdom, did I say? if they had a grain of common sense, I should have said—of that salt whose savour our Saviour bids us not lose? All their honour, their power, their victories, their offices, their dispensations, their taxes, their licences, their indulgences, their horses, mules, and attendants, their vicious pleasures, would in this case be forfeited and lost. You see how many

* Alexander VI. succeeded by the grossest bribery in securing for himself the triple crown. He perished by a poisoned draught which he had prepared for one of his Cardinals.

markets, how large a harvest, what an ocean of property, I have comprehended in a few words ! They would substitute for them vigils, fasts, tears, prayers, sermons, studies, sighs, and a thousand mortifications and labours. I must not omit also to state that all their clerks, amanuenses, notaries, advocates, proctors, secretaries, grooms, ostlers, serving-men, and something else which for the sake of modesty I shall not mention; in a word, the immense crowd of men who are a burden—I made a mistake, I meant who are an honour—to the Roman Court, would lose their employment. An act of great inhumanity, too, it would be, an abominable crime, of which we cannot too strongly express our detestation, to compel the highest princes of the Church, the true lights of the Gospel, to go forth once more with the wallet and the staff of the beggar ! But now, whatever work there is they generally leave to Peter and 'Paul, who have plenty of leisure for it; whatever pomp and pleasure, they appropriate to themselves. Thus then to me they owe it that no class of men leads a more effeminate or less anxious life. They think to satisfy Christ, whom they pretend to serve, with their great state and magnificence, with the ceremonies of instalments, with the titles of Reverence and Holiness, and with exercising their episcopal functions only in blessing and cursing.

“To work miracles is, they think, an obsolete custom, and one altogether unsuited to the present times; to teach the people is too laborious; to explain the sacred volume is to interfere with the prerogative of the schoolmen; to pray is a proof of indolence; to shed tears is cowardly, and shows a womanish weakness; to fast is to be mean and sordid; to be easy and familiar is to be unworthy of one who will scarcely allow even the greatest kings to kiss his blessed feet; . . . to die for religion is too self-denying; to be crucified, as their Lord of Life, is base and ignominious. Their only weapons ought to be those of the Spirit; and of these they

are very liberal, as their interdicts, their suspensions, their denunciations, their aggravations, their greater and lesser excommunications, and their terrible bulls, by which, at their pleasure, they consign the souls of mortals to the lowest depths of hell ; weapons which these very holy fathers and these vicars of Christ wield against none with greater severity than against those who, at the instigation of the devil, endeavour to lessen and to spoil the patrimony of St. Peter. Although these words are in the Gospels, ‘ Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee,’ they yet say that the patrimony consists of fields, towns, taxes, tolls, lordships. When inflamed with Christian zeal they are fighting in defence of these possessions, are laying waste a territory with fire and sword, are pouring forth the blood of Christian men in torrents, and are, as they say, bravely vanquishing their enemies, they think that they are defending the Church, the spouse of Christ, in a manner truly apostolical ; as if indeed there were any enemies of the Church more pernicious than impious popes . . . who corrupt the Gospel by their forced interpretations, and traditions, and by their lusts and wickedness, grieve the Holy Spirit, and make the Saviour’s wounds bleed afresh. Moreover, as the Christian Church was founded with blood, was strengthened by blood, was established with blood, so now, as if Christ were dead, and could not protect His own subjects in His own way, they wield the sword in defence of it. And although war is so cruel that it becomes wild beasts rather than men, so frantic that the poets represent it as sent by the Furies, so pestilential that it brings in its train an universal dissolution of manners, so unjust that it is usually carried on best by the worst robbers, so impious that it has no connection with Christ, yet, neglecting everything else, they make this the only business of life. Here you may see even decrepit old men showing all the vigour of youth, incurring any expense, not fatigued

by any toil, deterred by nothing, if only they can overturn law, religion, peace, and throw all the world into confusion. There are not wanting, too, learned flatterers who call this manifest madness, zeal, piety, valour, and discover a way in which a man can brandish the fatal sword, and drive it into the bowels of his brother, while he yet possesses that very great love which, according to the precept of Christ, he owes to his neighbour.* In truth I cannot tell whether or no the Popes learnt to fight from certain German bishops, or whether these learnt to do so from them. They go further than the Heads of the Church, for they throw off their episcopal dress, they neglect public worship, they never bless the people, or think of other ceremonies of a similar description, and appear openly armed as warriors, accounting it cowardly and unbecoming in a bishop to die at any other time than when he is bravely fighting on the battlefield.

“Now also the common herd of priests, accounting it impious to degenerate from the sanctity of their diocesans, wage war in true military fashion for their tithes, with syllogisms and arguments, as fiercely as with swords, spears, darts, stones, or any other kind of weapon. . . . But in the meantime they do not remember what they may read everywhere, respecting the duties which they owe to the people. Their shorn head does not remind them that a priest ought to pare off and cut away all worldly lusts, and ought to meditate only upon heavenly things. But these very delightful men say that they have done their duty well if they mumble after a fashion their well-known prayers, which I shall be much surprised if any Saint or man can hear or understand, when they

* The reader will at once see that Erasmus is, in the whole of this passage, writing against Pope Julius. The wonder is that he should have had the courage to write in the lifetime of that Pope a satire which was read all over Europe.

are quite unintelligible and inaudible to themselves. In this respect the priests resemble the profane, that they all look carefully after the harvest of gain, and all know the best means of obtaining it. If there should be any burden to be borne, they prudently put it upon the shoulders of their neighbours, and toss it about as a ball from one to the other. Just as kings delegate a part of their public duties to their representatives, who in their turn devolve a part of them upon others, so they leave religion entirely to the people, since they are too modest to make a profession of it themselves. The people again say that these are the duties of the men whom they call ecclesiastics, as if they had nothing at all to do with the Church, or as if their baptism had been an unmeaning ceremony. Again, the priests who call themselves secular, thinking that their title shows that they belong not to Christ, but to the world, assign this task to the regulars, the regulars to the monks ; while the monks pass it from one order to another till it comes to the Mendicants ; *they* lay it on the Carthusians, in whom alone piety lies buried, and so buried that it is scarcely ever possible to see it. In like manner the Popes, who are very diligent in reaping the pecuniary harvest, commit those duties which are too apostolical for them to the bishops, the bishops again to the pastors, the pastors to the curates, and the curates to the Mendicant brothers. These again return them to those by whom the wool of the sheep is shorn.

“It is not, however, my purpose to describe the lives of Popes and priests, lest I should seem to be weaving a satire, not pronouncing a panegyric, or to be censuring good kings, while I praise the wicked. But I have said a few words about these things, that everybody may understand that there is no man who can live happily unless he is initiated into my mysteries, and has me for his friend.”

Folly then, having directed her shafts against other

classes, concludes her address in the following manner.* “If I have spoken with too much petulance or loquacity, remember that Folly has been speaking to you, and that the speaker is a woman. I see that you expect an epilogue; but you are very foolish if you suppose that I remember still anything which I have said, when I have poured forth so great a medley of words. . . . Wherefore, farewell, plaudite, vivite, bibite, ye very distinguished votaries of Folly.”

This translation will give an idea of this celebrated work. It was not originally designed for publication, but having been finished, it was, at the instigation of More and his other friends, for whose amusement it was begun, sent over to be printed at Paris in the summer of 1511. In reply to Stunica, Erasmus says that 20,000 copies were sold in the course of a few months. It was read all over Europe. Popes, kings, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, princes, all the great, the gay, and the polished, who understood Latin, read and admired this work. Pope Leo perused it. Erasmus, too, he said, has his corner in the region of Folly. Neither he, nor any other Pope who occupied, while Erasmus lived, the chair of St. Peter, reproached him with the work. The celebrated painter, Holbein, of whom I shall speak particularly hereafter, by that wonderful skill for which he was conspicuous, aided in increasing the sensation which the “Praise of Folly” produced throughout the continent of Europe. He illustrated it with thirty-eight pictures, which he completed in ten days. The originals are preserved in the public library of Basle. These may be seen drawn with the pen in the margin, near the particular scenes and characters to which they refer, in the Leyden edition of his works, and in the Basle edition of the “Praise of Folly,” which was published in 1676. The following are some of

them :—We see the hounds in full cry, followed by men with spears, who are blowing horns ; a dice-board, at which two men are seated, with foolscaps and ears, throwing about the dice ; a man standing in an attitude of adoration before an image of St. Christopher ; the devil, with his horns, appearing to St. Bernard ; a king with a sceptre, a crown, and a chain of gold round his neck, seated on his throne ; a bishop, with his forked mitre, his gloves, and his pastoral staff ; a man with a paunch, given up to ease and indulgence, and grasping a wine-cup, with this inscription underneath it—“*Epicuri de grege porcum* ;” and Erasmus himself seated in his study, with his “*Adages*” in his hand. It is said that when Erasmus looked at the last but one, he wrote under it, “*Holbein* ;” and that when he came to his own, he immediately said that if Erasmus looked so well, it was not too late for him to begin to think of a wife. These scenes and characters are represented with so much skill that they bring before us exactly the idea which was present to the mind of Erasmus when he wrote his remarkable satire. The following Latin quotation from the Basle edition above referred to shows what Holbein, by his pictures, did for the “*Praise of Folly*.”

“*Rex Macedum Coo tumidus piktore cani se
Mæonio dolet, non potuisse seni.
Stultitiæ potior sors est, hanc alter Apelles,
Pingit et eloquium, laudat, Erasme, tuum.*”

This celebrated work abounds in allusions to some of the most elegant passages in the writings of ancient authors. Many of them are to us trite and pedantic. Then, however, they were fresh and original. The passages quoted from classical writers are constantly applied in a very lively manner to the manners and customs of the age in which he lived. The following is a brief description of the plan of the

work :—Folly at first indulges in harmless pleasantry. She attributes to her followers the enjoyments of life which are unknown to the wise. Afterwards, when she has laughed at all the absurdities of the age, she becomes a serious satirist, lashing most unmercifully all, however high in station, who, by their vices, crimes, and follies, had exposed themselves to her displeasure. Erasmus, in reply to Dorpius, who blamed certain passages, says that the “Praise of Folly” afterwards exposed him to much censure; and that he would not have composed a work so gay on subjects which in the issue proved so serious, if he had foreseen the troubles with which the Church would afterwards be afflicted.* This is one of the numerous proofs of his timidity. The monks, the scholastic divines, and the hypocrites, against whom he directed his most envenomed shafts, were, when they understood the satire, very angry with him. He was obliged to draw up an apology, addressed to Dorpius in 1515. More undertook the defence of it in a letter to the latter, who at length owned that he was perfectly satisfied.† In 1542 the Sorbonne condemned it in severe terms, and some of his enemies procured the insertion of it in the Roman index. The monks never forgave him. It is indeed impossible to justify it altogether. The mention of the Redeemer of the world in such a work was equally offensive to piety and good taste. We cannot doubt, however, that it produced, on the whole, a beneficial effect. As we shall see hereafter, by his pungent satire on the vices and follies of ecclesiastics, he promoted the progress of the Reformation throughout the continent of Europe.

* Ep. Dorpio, edit. Bas., cum notis G. Lystri, 1676, p. 237.

† Ibid., p. 281.

CHAPTER V.

INTERCOURSE WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY OF ENGLAND.—
RESIDENCE AT CAMBRIDGE.—ACCOUNT OF HIS VISITS
TO WALSINGHAM AND CANTERBURY IN HIS COLLOQUY,
“PEREGRINATIO RELIGIONIS ERGO.”—(A.D. 1510—1514.)

ERASMUS, when he was in Italy, had received before the death of Henry VII., from Henry, Prince of Wales, an elegant Latin epistle, in which he commends his style, and expresses his admiration of his erudition.* This letter seems to have been in answer to one which he had received from him. Their acquaintance had begun when Henry was a child. Shortly before he left England in 1500, when he was staying with Lord Mountjoy near Greenwich, his friend Thomas More, who was then a student at Lincoln's Inn, came to pay him a visit. Soon after his arrival he took him out for a walk to a stately mansion, which, he was told, was the king's nursery.† Here he saw Prince Henry, then a boy of nine years of age. On his right hand stood Lady Margaret, afterwards married to James, King of Scotland; Lady Mary, four years old, was playing on his left hand; and Prince Edmund was in the nurse's arms. More, and a friend

* Op. tom. iii. p. 911, edit. Bas.

† Catalogus Op. D. Erasmi ab ipso conscriptus, præfixus operum tom. primo, edit. Bas.

who accompanied him, had no sooner entered than they presented an offering on paper to the prince. Erasmus was not prepared to give anything to him; but told him that he would send him a literary tribute on some future occasion. He was very angry with More for having suffered him to come unprovided with an offering; the more so as Henry sent an epistle to him at dinner as a kind of challenge. He returned to Lord Mountjoy's house, and in three days produced an elegant Latin ode.* The following passage, in which England describes her wealth and fertility, is a very good specimen of it:—

“At mihi nec fontes nec ditia flumina desunt,
Sulcive pingues, prata nec ridentia.
Fœta viris, fœcunda feris, fœcunda metallis,
Ne glorier, quod ambiens largas opes
Porrigit Oceanus, neu quod nec amicus ulla
Cœlum, nec aura dulcius spirat plaga.”

He then gives to the king, Henry VII., many lines of adulation. In reading them we must remember that this was the language in which it was the law to address kings.† He describes him as the miracle of his age, a conqueror in war, but a lover of peace, indulgent to others, severe only to himself. He adds that he wished to be feared only by the lawless, and to reign in the affections of his people; that his country was as dear to him as Rome to the Decii, or Athens to Codrus, when they became victims to the public good; that he was equal to Nestor in eloquence; that he rivalled, nay, surpassed Cæsar in intellect, and Mæcenas in generosity. He afterwards describes in glowing language

* Op. tom. i. pp. 1018—1022, edit. Bas.

† Erasmus afterwards composed a poem on the coronation of Henry VIII., which is complimentary to him and his queen, and a most severe satire on the reign of his avaricious and rapacious father.

the royal children. He compares Prince Arthur to Phœbus emerging from the eastern waves, and describes his noble countenance and his bright eyes, in which the vigour of his mind was reflected; he then eulogizes "the pearl," Margarita, and the boy Henry, to whom he could not give a greater meed of flattery than when he told him that he was an exact likeness of his noble father; and concludes with calling on the nymphs to shower down violets, thyme, and crocuses on the cradle of the infant Edmund.

He dedicated this ode to Prince Henry, and sent it with an eulogistic epistle, of which the following is the substance. He tells him that he did not give him gold or jewels, because others could give them, because they were transitory possessions, and because a great king ought rather to give than receive them; but that he gave him an ode, which he considered a far better gift, because it was one which very few could make to him, and because it would confer upon him immortal glory. "I have dedicated this trifle to you now," he adds, "in your boyhood, but I will give you something better hereafter, when your virtues, advancing with your advancing years, shall supply a wider field for poetry. To this I should incite you, but that your own natural genius prompts you to it, and you have for your guide and preceptor Mr. Skelton, that singular light and ornament of literature in Britain, who is able not only to promote, but to finish your studies.* Farewell, illustrious prince, be the patron of good letters; adorn them with your example; protect them by your authority; improve them with your bounty."

* He had described Skelton in the ode as directing Henry's poetic studies. He only spoke thus highly of him from common report, for he did not know English. Skelton was as yet known only by his verses on the fall of the house of York. He had been crowned with the poetic wreath at Louvain.

On the accession of Henry VIII. to the throne in 1509, his friend, Lord Mountjoy, had, as we have seen, urged him to hasten his return to this country, and had encouraged him to expect high preferment from the king on account of the favourable opinion of him which he entertained.* On his arrival, he fulfilled the promise in his letter, and dedicated to him a translation from Plutarch. The subject was "How to know a friend from a flatterer," which, he thought, would be very useful to one occupying an exalted station. It appears that Erasmus thought very highly of the king's abilities. He speaks, in a letter to his friend Cockleius, of the excellent education given to him by his father; gives many proofs of his mental powers from his letters, which he says that his friend, Lord Mountjoy, can prove to have been written by himself; says that he had made great progress in mathematics, and that even after his elevation to the throne, he would often find time, amid the harassing cares of royalty, to apply himself to literary and scientific pursuits.† He also showed his regard for Henry by vindicating his title to the kingdom of France against his adversary Bedda, who was very angry because Erasmus had mentioned it in his dedication to the king before his Paraphrase on St. Luke's Gospel.‡ That dedication had been made to him in acknowledgment of a present of sixty angels which Henry sent to him. In an epistle to Servatius, written as we shall see in 1514, he says that the king had given him many proofs of his great esteem; that he wrote to him when he was in Italy most affectionate letters with his own hand; that he speaks in the highest terms of him; that he embraced him whenever he paid his respects to him; that the queen wished to have him for her instructor; that the

* Op. tom. iii. p. 189, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., p. 909, edit. Bas.

‡ Epist. And. Critio, tom. iii. p. 937, edit. Bas.

king, and the Bishop of Lincoln (Wolsey), had made him great promises;—and that he might have had any amount of preferment if he had breathed the sickly atmosphere of a court, and had given up his beloved studies.*

Erasmus seems to have spent some months after his return to England with More, Lord Mountjoy, and Archbishop Warham. The latter had given him many proofs of his friendship. Erasmus tells us that he had shown as much regard for him as if he had been his father or brother. Warham had, without any solicitation on his part, given to him in the course of a few years four hundred nobles, and even as much as one hundred and fifty in a day.† He had also in March, 1511, offered to him the Rectory of Aldington, near Ashford in Kent.‡ Erasmus at first declined it, alleging as his reason that the incumbent ought to reside and to feed the flock committed to his charge; whereas he could not do so, because he could not speak English. This ignorance of our language may well astonish us when we consider the length of his residence in this country, and the intimate friendship which he had formed with many of its most distinguished inhabitants. Archbishop Warham so far respected his conscientious scruples as to appoint another clergyman to the living; but he at the same time charged it with a pension of £20 a year to Erasmus. When he made this arrangement, the archbishop said to him, “What great service could you do, if you were to preach to a small country congregation? Now you do much greater service by your writings, in which you teach the preachers themselves; and it would seem strange if you did not receive a little of the Church’s revenues.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1527, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid.

‡ Aldington was the parish in which, some years after, appeared Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, whose history is so well told by Mr. Froude.

I will take that matter upon myself; I will see that the duty is properly supplied." "He was as good as his word," writes Erasmus. "He removed his suffragan, the first person appointed, who from his numerous engagements was unable to pay proper attention to the duties of the parish, and presented a young and active man, a good theologian, and a person of high character, to the incumbency."*

This practice of charging a living with a pension to an incumbent, which he was to receive after his resignation of it till the time of his death, had become very common in England at the time before us. The archbishop had positively forbidden it in his diocese, because it led to simoniacal contracts, and because it was very injurious to the rights of patrons. He made an exception, however, in favour of Erasmus, assigning the following very satisfactory reason for it. He states that no one ought to wonder that he had not kept his resolution in the present instance, because Erasmus was a man of consummate knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, who, by his learning and eloquence, adorned like a star the age in which he lived. He adds, that though he was a most learned divine, and conversant with every other branch of learning, as well as a most eloquent writer of Greek and Latin, he could not explain the word of God to his parishioners in the English language. He had, therefore, asked him to appoint another person to the living, and to charge it with a pension to himself, by which arrangement he would not only consult the best interests of the parish, but also enable Erasmus to devote himself altogether to his favourite studies. He says that he had the less hesitation in complying with his request, because Erasmus had shown a wonderful love to the English nation; so that, despising Italy, France, and Germany, in which countries

* Ecclesiastes, Op. tom. v. p. 678, edit. Bas.

he might have enjoyed some degree of opulence, he had come to spend the remainder of his life with his friends in this country, and to give them the pleasure of his learned conversation.*

Erasmus appears to have gone to the University of Cambridge about August, 1511.† He probably visited Cambridge for the first time, and was made bachelor of divinity, in the early part of 1506. He owed all his advantages at it to the celebrated Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, who, as all students of history will remember, was beheaded for denying the king's supremacy. This prelate, who was one of the great patrons of Erasmus, was very anxious for the restoration of learning at Cambridge, and hoped by his means to accomplish his object. He promoted him therefore to the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity, and afterwards to the Greek Professor's chair. As his means were not very abundant, the bishop supplied him with money. Erasmus lived with him at Queen's College, of which he was president, and accompanied him wherever he moved.‡ In compliance with his request, Erasmus drew up the Latin epitaph for the tomb of his friend and benefactress, Margaret, Countess of Richmond, in Westminster Abbey. He received for it twenty shillings.

Erasmus, when he was in England, often made excursions into the country. He tells the following amusing story of an incident which occurred as he was on his way to Rich-

* See the original deed taken out of Archbishop Warham's Registry in the Appendix to Knight's "Life of Erasmus," p. 40.

† At this date his letters from Cambridge begin.

‡ His rooms are still shown. A walk in the gardens is even now called by his name. His corkscrew is kept by the bursar of the college. The inference from this relic is that the strong beer of Cambridge did not agree with him, and that he drank wine instead of it.

mond. It is to be found in one of the most entertaining of his Colloquies, which is called "Exorcismus, sive Spectrum."* I wish that I could find space for the whole of it, as the perusal of it would be advantageous to those who readily believe tales of apparitions. His friend Pole was the contriver of the deceit. It shows how easily a belief in the marvellous was propagated in those days. "Several of us were riding together to Richmond. Amongst them there were some whom you would call discreet men. The sky was wonderfully serene ; there was not the appearance of a cloud upon it. Pole, looking with fixed eyes upwards, made the sign of the cross on his face and shoulders ; and composing his features so as to express the feeling uppermost in his mind, uttered an exclamation of wonder. When those who rode next to him asked him what he saw, again marking himself with a larger cross, he exclaimed, 'May a most merciful God avert from us this prodigy !' When they pressed upon him, eager to know what was the matter, fixing his eyes upon the sky, and pointing to a particular part of it, he said, 'Do you not see there a large dragon, armed with fiery horns, having his tail twisted into a circle ?' When they told him that they could not see it, he told them to look fixedly towards it, and often showed them the exact place. At length one of them, fearing that he should seem to be short-sighted, declared that he also saw it. His example was followed first by one, then by another ; for they were ashamed not to see what was so very plain. In short, within three days the report was spread all over England, that this wonderful sight had been seen. It is surprising how much popular report added to the story. Some gave a serious interpretation to this prodigy. He who had invented it laughed heartily at their folly."

* Colloquia cum notis selectis variorum, Lugd. Batav., 1664. Accurante Corn. Schrevello, p. 337.

In the autumn of 1513 he made a pilgrimage from Cambridge to the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham, of which he has given the following amusing account in his Colloquy of the "Religious Pilgrimage."* The persons who hold the conversation are Menedemus and Ogygius. The former had missed the latter for six months from the neighbourhood. He meets him, and asks him what had become of him during that time. He was informed that he had been on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, and of the Virgin in England. The conversation is then carried on between them in the following manner :—

Men.—I have often heard of the first. I should be much obliged to you to give me an account of the second.

Og.—I will gladly do so in as few words as possible. Her name is very celebrated throughout England. You will not find a person in that island who expects to do well unless he makes every year an offering at it according to his means. The Virgin dwells at the extreme coast of England on the north-west, about three miles from the sea.† The inhabitants gain their livelihood chiefly by the crowd of visitors to the shrine. There is a college of canons there, whom the Latins call by the name of regulars; a middle sort between the monks and the canons called secular. . . . This has scarcely any revenue but what arises from the liberality of the Virgin.‡ The larger offerings are laid up in store; but if

* Op. tom. i. p. 656, edit. Bas.

† Erasmus is not quite correct in this description. Walsingham is in Norfolk, about seven miles from Wells, the nearest seaport, and about eight miles from the sea. Most of the pilgrims would land at Lynn, which is twenty-seven miles distant.

‡ Erasmus was not correctly informed. The priory had considerable landed property. The annual income in 26th Henry VIII. was £391. 11s. 1d. The offerings were as follows :—at the chapel of the Virgin, £250. 1s.; at the sacred milk, £2. 2s. 3d.; at the chapel of St. Lawrence, £8. 9s. 1½d.

there should be any coin, or anything of small value, it is applied to the support of the flock and of their head, who is called a prior.*

Men.—Do they lead a good life?

Og.—Reputable enough. They are richer in piety than in their annual income. The church is graceful and elegant; the Virgin, however, does not reside in it, but has done her Son the honour to give it to Him. . . . She has her own church, that she may be on her Son's right hand. She had not, however, yet made it her abode; for it is unfinished, and stands without doors and windows; and near is the ocean, the father of winds.

Men.—A hard case. Where then does she reside?†

Og.—In the church which I have described as unfinished there is a narrow wooden chapel, with a narrow wicket on each side for the admission and departure of the pilgrims.

* The pilgrimages to Walsingham commenced in or before the reign of Henry III., who was there in 1241. The letter written by Queen Catherine of Arragon to Henry VIII., announcing the victory of Flodden, commences with telling him that she was on her way to Walsingham. The people supposed that the galaxy, or milky way, was placed in the heavens to guide pilgrims by night to Walsingham, and is therefore sometimes called the Walsingham way. Edward I. was there in 1280 and 1290, and Edward II. in 1315.

† This description of the churches of Walsingham priory is correct. There were two—the priory church, and the wooden chapel of the Virgin, around which the new work of stone had been erected, but was never finished, as he has described it. The surface of the soil had been so changed, and so occupied by the gravel walks and shrubberies of an ornamental pleasure ground, that though it was well known that the Lady Chapel was 200 feet from the wells referred to presently, yet it was for a long time considered impracticable to excavate with the view of discovering the site. Thus the wonder-working spot, where stood the shrine which kings visited bare-footed, was for a long time undiscovered. Excavations made about twenty years ago have, however, shown its foundations.

There is scarcely any light in it excepting from wax tapers. A fragrant odour is diffused through it.

Men.—All this harmonizes well with religious worship.

Og.—If, Menedemus, you look inside, you will say that it is an abode worthy of the Saints ; for it is resplendent with jewels, gold, and silver. . . . In the innermost chapel, which I have called the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, a canon stands near the altar.

Men.—For what purpose ?

Og.—To receive and guard the offerings.

Men.—Do those give who are unwilling to do so ?

Og.—Certainly not. A kind of pious modesty actuates some, who will give if any one be near, or will give rather more than they intended, but who will give nothing if there is no one to see them.

Men.—That is a natural feeling, and one not altogether unknown to me.

Og.—Nay, there are some so devoted to the most holy Virgin, that while they pretend to put an offering on the altar, they take away with wonderful dexterity what some one else has placed upon it. . . . On the northern side there is a door, not in the church, but in the outer wall, with which the whole space adjacent to the church is surrounded. There is in it a very little wicket, such as we see in the folding-gates of the nobility. Those who wish to enter must first bend the knee, and then lower their heads.

Men.—Certainly it would not be safe for an enemy to enter through such a wicket.

Og.—You are quite right. The man who shows strangers the curiosities tells every one that a knight on horseback escaped through this gate from his enemy, who was in close pursuit. The unhappy man, who was in a state of despair, suddenly determined to make the blessed Virgin, who was in the neighbourhood, his preserver. For he had made up

his mind to fly to her altar if the gate should be open. Now hear and wonder. On a sudden the knight was quite within the wall of the church, while his enemy was standing, full of fury, outside it.*

Men.—Can he persuade people to believe this wonderful story?

Og.—Yes.

Men.—He would find it a very difficult matter to make a philosopher like you believe it.

Og.—He showed me a brass plate fastened to the gate with nails, on which was the likeness of the knight who had been preserved, in the dress worn in those days by the English. We see it in the older pictures. If it is a correct representation, the barbers, dyers, and weavers of those days must have starved.

Men.—Why so?

Og.—Because he had a beard like a goat, and his whole garment had not a single wrinkle in it, and was no larger than the body, so that, being drawn close, it made the body somewhat narrow. . . . Under the wicket was an iron grating, through which only one on foot could pass. It was not right that a horse should tread on ground which the knight had consecrated to the Virgin.

Men.—This is as it should be:

* The English version of the story is cited in Blomefield's "History of Norfolk," from an old manuscript, which describes the wicket-gate as "not past an elne high, and three quarters in bredth. And a certain Norfolk knight, Sir Raaf Botetourt, armed cap-a-pee and on horse back, being in days of old, 1314, pursued by a cruel enemy, and in the utmost danger of being taken, made full speed for this gate, and invoking this Lady for his deliverance, he immediately found himself and his horse within the close and sanctuary of the Priory, in a safe asylum, and so fooled his enemy." The name of "Knight Street" is the only local evidence now remaining of the scene of this exploit.

Og.—To the east of it is a chapel full of wonders, to which I then proceeded. Another person came forward to show them to me. We prayed in it for a short time. A joint of the middle finger of a man was shown to us. I kissed it, and asked whose it was. The answer was, “St. Peter’s.” “What, the apostle?” I said. The reply was, “Yes.” Then looking at the joint, which seemed to be as large as a giant’s, I said, “St. Peter must then have been a man of enormous size.” Hereupon I was much annoyed to find one of my companions bursting out into a hoarse laugh; for if he had been quiet, the sexton would, without hesitation, have shown to us all the other wonders. However, we pacified him by giving him money. Before the shrine was a shed, which is said to have been suddenly brought in winter-time, when the country was covered with snow, from a great distance to that spot. Under this house are two wells, full up to the top.* We were told that the fountain is sacred to the blessed Virgin. The water is very cold, and is of service for the headache and stomach-ache.

Men.—If cold water should serve as a cure for pains of this description, we may hereafter expect oil to extinguish fire.

Og.—You are hearing of a miracle, my good man. If this cold water could only quench our thirst, there would be nothing miraculous in it; and this is only one part of the story. . . . The fountain is said to have suddenly sprung forth from the earth at the command of the most holy Virgin. As I was carefully looking round at everything, I asked how many years ago that little house had been brought to that place. The answer was, “Several centu-

* These wells still exist, lined with ashlar stone, and near them is a bath called the wishing-well. The popular idea was that the devotees to the Lady of Walsingham were taught to believe that when they drank of this water they might obtain what they then wished for.

ries." "But the walls," I said, "do not show any signs of age." He did not deny it. "Nor," I continued, "do these wooden posts." He admitted that they had been lately placed there, and indeed the thing spoke for itself. "Then this roof and thatch seem to be new." He agreed with me. "Even these cross-beams, too, and the rafters on which the straws rest, seem to have been fixed not many years ago." He nodded assent. When I had thus disposed of every part of the house, I asked him, "How does it appear that this house has been brought from a great distance?"

Men.—Oh, tell me how he got out of this difficulty.

Og.—Why, he showed us a very old bear-skin fixed to the rafters, and almost laughed at our dulness because we did not see this convincing proof of the truth of what he said.* Convinced in this manner, and admitting that we were dull indeed, we turned to the heavenly milk of the blessed Virgin.

Men.—The mother in truth seems to be exactly like the Son. He left a large quantity of His blood in the world; she has left far more milk than you could suppose that a woman who has brought forth one child could produce, even if the infant had drunk none of it.

Og.—They make the same pretence respecting the wood of the cross, which is shown in public and private in so many places. If all the fragments were brought together, they would seem a proper load for a merchant-ship, and yet our Lord carried the whole of His cross.

Men.—Does not this appear strange to you?

Og.—It may be said to be something new, but scarcely

* In the queries prepared for the visitors sent by Henry VIII. to make inquiry at Walsingham, it is asked, "What of the house where the beere-skin is, and of the knyght?" and they conclude with asking "whether the house over the welles were not made within time of remembraunce?" These questions were probably suggested by reading Erasmus's work.

strange, since the Lord who increases it at His pleasure is omnipotent.

Men.—You give a pious explanation of the matter, but I fear that many of these things are invented for gain.

Og.—I do not think that God will allow any one to mock Him in this manner. . . . But now hear what I have to say to you besides. That milk is kept on the high altar, in the middle of which is Christ, with His mother on the right hand, as the post of honour. For the milk represents the Virgin Mother.

Men.—It can, then, be seen?

Og.—Yes, in a crystal vessel.

Men.—It is, then, liquid?

Og.—How can you suppose it to be liquid, when it is more than 1500 years old? It is concrete, and looks like beaten chalk tempered with the white of an egg.

Men.—Why, then, do they not show it uncovered?

Og.—That the milk of the Virgin may not be polluted by the kisses of the men.

Men.—That is as it should be; for some would (I think) touch it with impure lips.*

Og.—When the canon in attendance saw us, he ran towards us, put on his surplice, placed the sacred stole round his neck, and fell down most devoutly to worship. He then gave us the sacred milk to kiss. Afterwards we also fell down on the lowest step of the altar, and having first called upon Christ, we addressed the Virgin in the following prayer, which I had prepared for this occasion: “O Virgin Mother, who hast been thought worthy to give suck from thy breasts to thy Son Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, we pray that, purified by His blood, we also may attain to that happy infancy of dove-like sim-

* Some pilgrims were neither pure nor chaste. The justice of this stigma is confirmed by numerous authors, ancient and modern.

plicity, which, ignorant of deceit and guile, desires continually the milk of evangelical doctrine, until it comes to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, with whom thou shalt live for ever, with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Men.—A pious prayer truly! What followed?

Og.—Unless I am very much mistaken, Christ and His Mother seemed to be propitious to me. For the sacred milk appeared to leap up, and the Eucharist became somewhat brighter. In the meantime the canon silently approached us, holding out a little box, like those presented by the toll-collectors on the bridges in Germany. . . . We gave him some pence, which he presented to the Virgin. Presently I inquired, with as much politeness as possible, through an interpreter well acquainted with the English language, a young man of pleasing address (whose name, if I am not mistaken, was Robert Aldridge), how it could be proved that this was the real milk of the Virgin. I was anxious to obtain the information, because I was influenced by the pious wish of stopping the mouths of certain profane persons, who usually turn everything of this kind into ridicule. The man looked at us with a frown, but did not say a word. I requested my interpreter to repeat the question. He did so in the most courteous manner possible. Immediately the man, as if he had become the subject of a supernatural influence, regarding us with utter astonishment, and looking as if he were horror-stricken at our blasphemy, said, "Why need you ask that question, when you have an authentic record of it?" And he seemed as if he would have cast us out of the church as heretics, if we had not appeased his anger by giving him a few pence.

Men.—How did you feel in the meantime?

Og.—You may easily imagine. We drew back just as if we had been struck with a club, or blasted with thunder,

humbly imploring pardon for our boldness. . . . I was anxious now to see the inscription to which the man referred us. After having looked for it for some time, we at length found it placed against the wall, so that not every one could read it. As Aldridge was reading it, I carefully followed him with my eyes, not trusting altogether to him in so important a matter.

Men.—Were all your doubts removed?

Og.—I was ashamed of having ever entertained the least doubt. Everything was brought plainly before me, the name, the place, the story, all in due order; in short, nothing was omitted. The name was William. He was born at Paris. He was a man of great piety, which showed itself chiefly in a diligent search for the relics of the Saints throughout the world. Having gone on a pilgrimage to many countries, and having examined the monasteries and temples in them, he at length came to Constantinople, of which his brother was the bishop. As he was preparing to return, the latter informed him that there was a certain holy virgin, who had the milk of the Virgin Mother, and that he would be very fortunate if he could beg or buy from her a part of it, for all the relics which he had hitherto collected were nothing when compared with the holy milk. Accordingly William did not rest till he had begged earnestly for half of it. Having obtained it, he seemed with his treasure to be richer than Cræsus. . . . He immediately hastened home, but fell ill on his journey. When he found himself in danger, he privately sent for a Frenchman, a most faithful companion of his pilgrimage. He then gave the holy milk to his charge on this condition, that if he should return home safely, he should deposit that treasure on the altar of the Holy Virgin, who is worshipped in a magnificent church at Paris, which looks on either side on

the channel of the Seine.* . . . After the burial of William, the other hastens on his journey, and is likewise attacked with illness. Despairing of his recovery, he gave the milk to an English friend, and conjured him to do what he had intended to do himself. After his death, his friend took it and placed it upon the altar in the presence of the canons of that place, who were then, as still, called Regulars, as they now are at St. Geneviève. He obtained from them half the milk, and carried it to England. He at last, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, carried it to Walsingham. . . . Having gone through everything, while we were walking about and preparing to take our departure, looking round to see if there were anything else worth seeing, some of the inferior brethren again come to us. They look at us askance, they point with their fingers, they run forward, they go away from us, they return, they nod to us, and seem as if they would address us, if only they could summon up boldness to do so.

Men.—Were you at all afraid?

Og.—On the contrary, I turned towards them, smiling and looking at them as if I invited them to address me. At length one approached, and asked my name. I gave it to him. He then asked me if I were the person who, two years ago, fixed to the wall the votive tablets in the Hebrew letters. I said that I had done it.

Men.—Do you write Hebrew?

Og.—No, but whatever they do not understand they call Hebrew. Soon the sub-prior of the college came, having been, as I expect, sent for by them. . . . He addressed me very courteously, and told me how many had endeavoured to read those verses, and how many glasses had been wiped to no purpose. Whenever any old professor of theology

* He means the island which the Seine forms in the middle of the city of Paris.

or of law paid them a visit, they showed him the tablet. One said that the letters were Arabian ; another, that they had no meaning. One was at length found who could read the title. It was Latin, written in Latin capital letters. The verses were Greek, written in Greek capital letters, which at first sight appeared to resemble the Latin capitals. Having been asked to do so, I explained the meaning of the verses in Latin, translating word for word. They offered me a small reward for my trouble, but I persisted in refusing it, saying that there was no labour, however arduous, which I would not gladly undertake in honour of the most Holy Virgin ; that if she directed me to do so, I would even most gladly carry letters thence to Jerusalem. . . . He produced from his bag a fragment of wood, cut from a beam on which the Virgin Mother was seen to rest. A wonderful scent from it immediately convinced me that it was very sacred. Bending forward with bare head, I kissed several times most reverently this very valuable present, and put it in my bag. . . . I would not exchange it for all the gold of Tagus.* . . . Then the sub-prior, when he saw me contemplating that gift with a holy joy, judging me not unworthy of having information on more important matters given to me, asked me whether I had ever seen the secrets of the Virgin. That question rather frightened me. I did not dare to ask his meaning ; for in sacred matters a slip of the tongue is dangerous. I said that I had not seen them, but that I was most anxious to do so. I was led on as it were by a divine influence. Several wax tapers were lighted. An image was then shown to me, not remarkable for its size, nor for the material of which it was made, nor for the workmanship bestowed upon it, but possessing very great

* Most of the ancient writers say that the Tagus rolls down golden sands. Thus Ovid ;

“ Quodque suo Tagus amne vehit, fluit ignibus aurum.”

virtue. . . . At the feet of the Virgin was a jewel, which has no name yet among the Latins or Greeks. The French have given it a name derived from a toad, because it bears a resemblance to it such as the most skilful artist cannot produce.* The miracle is the greater because, though the stone is small, the figure of the toad does not project, but is seen through it, being as it were enclosed in the jewel itself.

Men.—Perhaps they imagine that it is like a toad, just as boys see in the clouds dragons breathing fire, volcanic mountains, and armed men meeting in battle.

Og.—I assure you that it is exactly like a living toad.

Men.—Thus far I have listened with patience to your tales. You must find some one else to believe this tale about the toad.

Og.—I am not surprised, Menedemus, to hear that this is your feeling. No one would have convinced me of its truth, even if a whole college of divines had asserted it, if I had not seen it with these eyes. . . . The man then showed us gold and silver figures. This, he said, is entirely of gold. This is silver gilt. He then informed us of the weight and price of every one of them, and of the name of the maker. When full of admiration I said that the Virgin must be happy indeed, because she possesses this abundance of gifts; the man said to me, "Since you are so devout a spectator, I do not think it right to hide anything from you; you shall see the things belonging to the Virgin which are not shown to everybody." Having said this, he took out of the altar itself all sorts of wonderful things. If I were to

* The word alluded to is *crapaudine*. That which seems to answer nearest to the description is a kind of stone supposed to be found in the head of a toad, and which is really the tooth or palate of a fish petrified. This, however, does not quite correspond to the pellucid stone mentioned by Erasmus.

attempt to describe every part of them, I could not finish my story in a day. Thus that pilgrimage ended very well for me. I was quite satiated with sight-seeing, and I carry with me this very valuable gift, a pledge given to me by the Virgin herself.

Men.—Have you never made any trial of the virtues of the wood?

Og.—Yes. In an inn, three days afterwards, I found a man in a state of frenzy, for whom chains were being prepared. I placed the wood without his knowledge against his brain. He fell into a deep sleep, which lasted for some time. When he rose in the morning, he had recovered his senses.

Men.—Perhaps it was not frenzy, but intoxication, which sleep always removes.

Og.—When you wish to joke, Menedemus, seek another subject. It is not pious nor safe to joke against the Saints. The man himself said that a woman of surpassing beauty appeared to him in his sleep, holding out to him a cup.

Men.—I should think that it contained hellebore.

Og.—I do not know. One thing is quite certain, that the man recovered his senses.

Such is the description of this pilgrimage given by Erasmus. Robert Aldridge, here referred to, was afterwards Bishop of Carlisle.* He had previously been Master of Eton School, Fellow and Provost of Eton, and Canon of Windsor. Erasmus speaks of the Greek ode in a letter to his friend Ammonius, dated in the previous May. He writes, "I know that you approve of a religious spirit. I intend to pay a visit to the shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham, and to hang up a Greek ode as a votive offering. When

* Seebohm's "Oxford Reformers," p. 273, and Knight's "Life," p. 144. See also a letter to Aldridge in Eras. Op. tom. iii. p. 790, edit. Bas. From his Epistles to Erasmus it appears that he was an elegant Latin writer.

you go there ask for it.”* He says in the ode, that “while some went to the shrine for wealth, others for health, others to ask for a long life equal to that of Nestor, he went to obtain the greatest of all gifts, a pure and enlightened conscience.”† It is evident, however, from several passages in which he plainly scoffs at the superstitions which were practised at Walsingham, that he is not to be considered as a devout worshipper of the Virgin ; that he thought that a better use might be made of the money spent on these expeditions ; that in fact the Colloquy is a bitter satire against all this superstition ; and that he considered that the “Romish doctrine concerning worshipping and adoration, as well of Images as of Reliques, is,” to use the words of the twenty-second article of the Church of England, “a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded on no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.”

But matters of this description were not suffered long to interrupt the work, to the prosecution of which he had determined to devote his energies. From his letters at Cambridge during 1511 and 1513, we find that he was busily engaged on an edition of the New Testament in Greek, accompanied by a Latin translation designed to correct the errors of the Vulgate.‡ We find also that he was working hard at the correction of the text of St. Jerome. He had also found time, not only to assist Colet with his advice respecting the celebrated school, now called St. Paul’s School, which he was founding, at his own expense, for the free education of 153 children, but also to draw up a treatise *De Copia Verborum* for the use of the scholars.§ He was also engaged in doing battle with the schoolmen. His “Com-

* Op. tom. iii. p. 291, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., tom. v. p. 1109, edit. Bas.

‡ Seebohm’s “Oxford’s Reformers,” p. 277.

§ Ibid., p. 216.

mentariolus de Ratione Studii," published in 1512, deserves more than a passing reference on account of the vast amount of knowledge which he expects from a master.

"He must pay most attention to the works of the best authors ; but he must not leave any unread, even if they should be written by inferior men. First he must go to the fountain-head, that is, to the Greeks and the ancients. Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, the disciple of the latter, and Plotinus, in whom the two are combined, will be his best instructors in philosophy. With regard to commentators on the sacred volume, none will teach him better than Origen, none in a more simple or agreeable manner than Chrysostom, none in a holier manner than Basil. . . . If he cannot spend much time upon every one, he must yet take something from all of them. Certainly with a view to the explanation of the poets, whose custom it is to lay every kind of learning under contribution, he must make himself acquainted with their mythology, which he can learn from no one better than from Homer, who is the father of it. The Metamorphoses and Fasti of Ovid will give him here not a little assistance, although they are written in Latin. He must learn geography, which is important in the study of history, and in reading the poets. On this subject Pomponius Mela has written a very short treatise, Ptolemy a very learned, and Pliny a very laborious one. For Strabo is not the only writer upon it. Here he must particularly observe what modern names of mountains, rivers, countries, cities, answer to the old ones. He ought to take the same pains in regard to names of trees, herbs, animals, tools, clothes, and gems, of which it is surprising how ignorant learned men generally are. This information is to be obtained from different authors who have written on agriculture, on war, on architecture, on cookery, on jewels, on plants, and on the nature of animals. . . . He must obtain information regarding

ancient times, not only from the old writers, but also from old coins, from inscriptions, and from stones. He must also learn the genealogy of the gods, of whom their fables are full. He must understand astrology. . . . He must be acquainted with the nature and properties of all things, because the poets borrow from them their similes, epithets, comparisons, images, metaphors, and other figures of that description. He must also carefully study history, which is useful in many more matters than in the explanation of the meaning of the poet. . . . In a word, there is no part of the art of war, of agriculture, of music, of architecture, a knowledge of which may not be useful to those who undertake to explain the works of the poets or the ancient orators. But you will say that I am putting an immense load on the teacher. I admit it; but I only burden the one that I may release the many. I want him to examine everything, that he may save his scholars from doing so.”*

Erasmus, after having resided for more than two years in the University of Cambridge, made up his mind to take his departure from England. He says, in a letter to Cardinal Grimanus, that he had been attracted to this country by magnificent promises, but had been in some measure disappointed in his expectations.† Perhaps one reason was that he had not followed the advice which he had given in a jesting tone to his friend Ammonius of Lucca, the Latin secretary to Henry VIII., with whom he had formed a great friendship during his residence in England. “First of all,” he said, “be impudent, thrust yourself into all affairs, elbow those who stand in your way, love and hate no one in good earnest, but consult your own advantage, give nothing with-

* Op. tom. i. p. 446, edit. Bas.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 68, edit. Bas.

out a prospect of gaining by it, be of the opinion of every one with whom you have to do.”*

Foreign countries had contended, and were still contending, as we shall see directly, for the honour of enrolling him amongst their citizens. But hitherto, for reasons already given, he had preferred England to all of them, and had determined to make it his permanent home. The same contention for him had been carried on, as he informs us, between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.† But the latter had not fulfilled the liberal promises which had induced him to teach the Greek language and theology to the students. He was now quite out of humour with the University, and threatened to keep his quarantine, and to take his departure in forty days, if better fortune should not befall him, of which he has not at present the least expectation.‡ He laid bare his griefs in a letter to his friend Ammonius in November, 1513, telling him how weary he was of Cambridge, where he had lived nearly four months like a snail in his shell, as it had been deserted on account of the plague; that he had spent sixty nobles, and had received barely one from any of his pupils; and that he was resolved very soon to depart from the University.§ The necessity of taking pupils, and of applying himself to secular studies, which, in consequence of his scanty means, was imposed upon him, had the effect of weighing down his spirit to the earth, and of distracting his thoughts from that work to which he was anxious to apply himself with unremitting ardour. He had hitherto, by the kindness of some of his friends, been saved from actual want. We have seen how Warham had provided for him. He speaks in the highest terms of his

* Op. tom. iii. p. 290, edit. Bas.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 1527, edit. Lugd.

‡ Epist. Gonello, Op. tom. iii. p. 264, edit. Bas.

§ Op. tom. iii. p. 292. edit. Bas.

disinterested liberality.* We are informed also that he had received from other bishops above a hundred nobles; and that his friend, Lord Mountjoy, gave him an annual pension of one hundred crowns.† But he could not expect that their bounty would flow on in a perennial stream. It might have been greater but for the war which Henry was carrying on for the recovery of France, and which Erasmus took every opportunity of condemning. He therefore determined to accept the first appointment which might save him from mendicancy, of which he was ashamed, and might render him altogether independent of the precarious liberality of strangers.

We cannot be surprised therefore to learn that he departed from Cambridge at the latter end of 1513, having accepted from the Emperor Charles the Great a post in his Council, an annual pension of 200 florins, and a benefice, a Canonry of Courtray.‡ He was in London in February, 1514.

I shall now give in his own words an amusing story of a conversation which he had at Westminster, at the lodgings of his friend Ammonius, with Canossa, an Italian, the Pope's legate: "Andreas Ammonius had invited me to dinner. I came, not having the least idea that there was a conspiracy against me, for I was very much attached to him. I found with him a man in a long robe, having his hair bound up in a net, attended by one servant. I conversed with Ammonius, not having the least suspicion that he was Canossa. Wondering at the military sternness of the man, I asked Andreas in Greek who he was. He answered also in Greek, 'He is a great merchant.' During dinner as usual I conversed with Ammonius, and told him stories, not concealing

* Epist. Cardinali Grimano, Op. tom. iii. p. 68, edit. Bas.

† Epist. Servatio, Jortin's "Life," vol. ii. p. 322.

‡ Epist. Leoni X., Op. tom. iii. p. 73, edit. Bas.

my contempt for the merchant. At length I asked Andreas whether the report were true that a legate had come by the order of Leo X. to bring about a peace between the Kings of France and England. He said, 'Yes.' 'The Sovereign Pontiff,' I replied, 'will not take me into his counsels. If he had done so I should have given him different advice.' 'Why?' said Ammonius. 'It was not desirable,' I said, 'to talk about peace.' I shortly afterwards asked whether it were true that he was a Cardinal. He made a shuffling reply. Presently he said, 'He has the spirit of a Cardinal.' At length the stranger said something in Italian, mixing in with it a few Latin words, in such a manner that you might easily discover that he was an intelligent merchant. Turning to me, he said, 'I wonder that you live in this barbarous country, unless it is that you would rather stand alone here, than be the first at Rome.' Astonished at this smartness in a merchant, I replied, 'I am living in a country which contains many men remarkable for their learning, among whom I would rather have the last place than be nowhere at Rome.' Being very angry with the merchant, I said this, and much more. I think that my good genius was then at my side; otherwise Ammonius would have exposed me to the greatest danger, for he was not ignorant how plainly I say whatever comes uppermost. After we rose from dinner Andreas and I walked some time longer in the garden." Erasmus says afterwards that the apartment where they dined looked towards the Thames, and that he returned on foot to his lodging, instead of returning by the boat.*

He afterwards discovered that he had been conversing with the Pope's agent, Cardinal Canossa. He was also informed that the legate wished him to accompany him to Rome; but he refused to do so, because he was afraid that he had made him his enemy, or displeased him by his

* Eras. Germ. Brixio, tom. iii. p. 1458, edit. Lugd.

conversation. Erasmus, however, afterwards changed his opinion of Canossa. He thus writes to a friend: "I offer you my warmest congratulations on your possessing the friendship of the most distinguished Cardinal, Ludovicus Canossa. I made his acquaintance in England, where he was employed by Pope Leo to negotiate a peace between the Kings of France and Great Britain. I greatly admired his remarkable genius, and formed a strong attachment to him. Both when I was in England, and afterwards in his letters, he gave me proofs of his favourable regard."*

Erasmus now prepared to take his departure from England. He could not leave without a heavy heart that little band of friends to whom he was bound by a tie of no common affection. His grief was shared especially by Colet. Erasmus was now almost always with him. They often took journeys together. A description of one of those journeys occurs in his Colloquy entitled "*Peregrinatio Religionis ergo*," from which a translation of his account of his visit to Walsingham has already been taken. This Colloquy is important; as it served to increase the anger of the monks against him. The persons who converse are, as before, Menedemus and Ogygius.†

Men.—Have you omitted to pay a visit to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury?

Og.—That is a shrine which of all in the world I was the least likely to neglect. No pilgrimage is holier.

Men.—I should be glad, if it does not give you too much trouble, to hear from you an account of it.

Og.—I will ask you, then, to give me your attention. That part of England which is opposite to France and Flanders is called Kent. Canterbury is its principal town. There are two monasteries in it, almost close to each other,

* Eras. Jacobo Tussano, Op. tom. iii. p. 1351, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid., Op. tom. i. p. 663, edit. Bas.

both of them belonging to the Benedictines. That which is called St. Augustine's seems the older of the two ;* the other, which is now called St. Thomas's, seems always to have been the seat of an Archbishop, where he lives with a few chosen monks, just as at the present day Bishops have houses close to the church, but separate from the houses of the other canons. . . . The Cathedral church, dedicated to St. Thomas,† rises with so much majesty towards heaven, that even when seen from afar it strikes religious awe into the spectator. By its magnificence it obscures the beauty of its neighbour, and quite casts into the shade a place which has been very sacred from remote antiquity. It has two large towers, which, from a distance, as it were, bid welcome to pilgrims, and send forth very loud peals from bells of brass far and wide through the neighbouring country. In the entrance to the church, which is at the south, stand three figures of armed men in stone, who, with impious hands, are slaying a very holy man. Their family names are inscribed. They are Tuscus, Fuscus, Berrus.‡

Men.—Why are the wretches so honoured ?

* Two noble gateways of St. Augustine's Abbey still remain ; St. Augustine's, or the north-west gate, built of Caen stone at the close of the thirteenth century, on the north side of which is the Almonry gate. On the south-west of the precinct is the cemetery gate. In 1844 Mr. Beresford Hope recovered the site from profane uses, and restored the early English guest chapel. Close to it is the Library of the Missionary College, incorporated June, 1848.

† Erasmus has made a mistake as to the name in this description. The shrine of St. Thomas was the principal object of devotion. But the cathedral was dedicated to Christ, and by that name it is always described.

‡ These are not much like the names of the murderers, who were four, Reginald Fitzurse, William de Tracy, Hugh de Moreville, and Richard Brito. It is supposed that the statues stood in the four niches still remaining in the doorway of the south porch of the cathedral.

Og.—They have, forsooth, the same honour given to them which is conferred upon Judas, Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, and the wicked Roman soldiers, well-carved figures of whom you see on gilded altars. The names are given that no one in future may be proud to bear them. They are placed prominently before us, that no courtier may hereafter lay hands on our Bishops, or on the possessions of the Church. For those three minions, after their crime, were struck with madness, and only recovered their senses when the aid of the most holy Thomas was implored on their behalf.

Men.—Oh! the enduring mercy of the martyrs!

Og.—When we had entered, a spacious and majestic building disclosed itself to our view. To this part any one may be admitted.

Men.—Is there nothing to be seen there?

Og.—Nothing but the vast size of the building, and some books fixed to pillars, amongst which is the Gospel of Nicodemus, together with the tomb of some one whose name I do not know.*

Men.—What is to be seen next?

Og.—An iron grating bars out admission to that part which lies between the extremity of the church and the choir, as it is called, but one can see through it. The ascent to it is by several steps, a vaulted passage under which admits us to the north. There is shown a wooden altar of the holy Virgin, of small size, and only remarkable as a monument of antiquity, administering a rebuke to the extravagant habits of the present age. There the pious man is said to have bid farewell to the Virgin when death

* It was a remarkable proof of the general ignorance of the Scriptures at this time that this spurious gospel should have been set up in the Metropolitan Cathedral. Books were constantly fixed in this manner before and since the invention of printing.

was at hand.* On the altar is the point of the sword,† with which the crown of the head of the very excellent Archbishop was cut off, and his brain was pierced, that he might be the more quickly dispatched.‡ Full of love to the martyr, we kissed with great veneration its sacred rust. Quitting this part of the church we enter the vault below. It has its own priests.§ There is first shown to us the pierced skull of the martyr. The forehead is left bare for us to kiss, but the other part is covered with silver. There is also shown a slip of lead engraved with his name Thomas Acrensis.|| In the same place, in the dark, hang up the hair-shirt, the girdles, and the bandages with which the Bishop used to mortify his flesh. The very look struck

* This was the story told to Erasmus. But in truth the altar was erected after the catastrophe, as is stated by the historian Ger-vase. A stone is still pointed out where Becket fell. A small piece cut out of it is supposed still to be preserved at Rome.

† The sword of R. Brito, supposed to have been that which gave the fatal blow, was fractured by striking against the pavement. The monks kept the point as an object of veneration, and a source of profit.

‡ The part of Becket's head, on which was the tonsure or corona, was hewn off by his murderers, and preserved in a setting of silver and precious stones, made in 1314, in a part of the cathedral still called after him Becket's crown, which was built at the close of the 12th century.

§ There are several chantry chapels in it, one of which, founded by the Black Prince, in the southern transept, and endowed with the manor of Vauxhall at Lambeth, still belonging to the church of Canterbury, became the Church of the French Protestant Refugees.

|| His mother is said to have been a Saracen. His birth was supposed to have taken place in London, but from his being called Acrensis, it would seem to have been at Acre, in the Holy Land. The chapel in Cheapside, London, founded by Becket's sister, and now the Mercers' Chapel, was generally known by the name of St. Thomas of Acre. The inscribed slip of lead was deposited in coffins to identify the body in case it should be disturbed.

horror into us. They seemed to upbraid us with our soft and effeminate habits.*

Men.—And perhaps the monks also.

Og.—I cannot say whether you are right or wrong. It is no business of mine. We then returned to the choir. The treasures on its northern side were unlocked for us. An immense quantity of bones, skulls, chins, hands, teeth, fingers, and entire arms was brought out to us, all of which we devoutly kissed. There would have been no end of it all, if my companion in my pilgrimage, showing plainly that he had had enough of it, had not interrupted the priest while he was eagerly showing to us these relics.

Men.—Who is he?

Og.—He is an Englishman, and his name is Gratianus Pullus.† He is a learned and pious man, but he is not so well affected towards that part of our religion as I could wish.

Men.—He is perhaps a Wickliffite.

Og.—I do not think so, although he had read his books. I do not know how he got hold of them.

Men.—Did he offend the priest?

Og.—An arm was produced, the flesh of which was still bloody. He shrunk back from kissing it, and his feelings of disgust were very plainly expressed on his countenance. Immediately the priest shut up the rest of his relics. Then we went to look at the high altar and the ornaments which

* Gervase, in relating the original interment of the Archbishop, thus describes his dress: "And that I may truly relate what I saw with my eyes, and handled with my hands, he wore next his skin a hair-shirt, then a linen one, over them the black cowl, then the alb in which he was consecrated, the tunic also, and dalmatic, chasuble, pall, and mitre. He had hair-drawers, with linen ones over woollen hose, and sandals."

† Gratianus Pullus is supposed, with good reason, to be his friend, Dean Colet.

had been lately hidden underneath it, all of them very rich. If you had seen the quantity of gold and silver, you would have said that Midas and Croesus were poor, when compared with the possessors of them.

Men.—Was there no kissing here?

Og.—No; I had feelings of a different kind.

Men.—What were they?

Og.—I sighed and wished that I had such relics in my own house.

Men.—That was a sacrilegious wish.

Og.—I admit it, and I humbly asked pardon from the Saint before leaving the church. We were then conducted to the sacristy.* How many rich silken vestments were there displayed!† What a number of golden candlesticks! We saw in the same place the staff of St. Thomas. It seemed a reed covered with silver plate, very light, not remarkable for its workmanship, and it did not reach higher than the waist.

Men.—Was there no cross?

Og.—I did not see any. His pall was shown, which was made of silk, but of a coarse texture. It had not any gold or jewels upon it. There was also the napkin for wiping his face, on which were to be seen very plainly the stains of blood. We gladly kissed these tokens of the simple habits of our forefathers.

Men.—Are not these shown to every one?

Og.—Certainly not, my good friend.

Men.—How was it, then, that so much confidence was placed in you that nothing was concealed from you?

* Probably the chapel of St. Andrew.

† In the inventory of relics we find that all these vestments were carefully preserved till the Reformation. We may form some idea of the number of all the relics when we hear that the inventory occupies eight folio pages in Dart's "History of the Cathedral."

Og.—I had some acquaintance with William Warham, the Archbishop, who gave me a letter of introduction.

Men.—I hear from many that he is a man of remarkable courtesy.

Og.—Nay, rather you would say if you knew him, that he is courtesy itself. He has so much learning, so much simplicity of character, so much piety, that you would say that nothing is wanting to make him a perfect Bishop. We were then conducted back to the upper floor; for behind the high altar we ascended again by a flight of steps into another church, as it were. There, in a chapel we saw the whole figure* of the Saint, set in gold and jewels. Here an unforeseen occurrence almost spoiled my pleasure.

Men.—I guess what you are going to say.

Og.—Here my companion, Gratianus, showed great rudeness. He interrupted the attendant priest in the midst of a prayer, by saying to him, "Tell me, my good father, is what I hear true, that Thomas, when he was alive, was very kind to the poor?" The priest assented, and began to enumerate his many acts of kindness to them. Then he continued; "I do not think that his feelings towards them are changed, excepting perhaps for the better." The priest agreed with him. He then said, "When the Saint was so liberal to the poor while he was poor himself, and had need of money for the supply of his bodily wants, can you suppose that he would be displeased now when he is rich and has need of nothing, if a poor widow who has starving children at home, or daughters whose virtue is in danger from the want of a dowry, or a husband lying on the bed of sickness, and destitute of the means of support, having

* The "tota facies," which translators have rendered "the whole face," was more probably a whole length, than a head. Professor Willis thinks so, for he calls it the image of St. Thomas. He supposes it to have stood in the Corona.

first asked his permission, should take a mere trifle from this vast wealth for the support of her family, from one who was most willing to give it, either as a free gift or as a loan to be repaid?" Finding that the priest, who had charge of the golden figure, made him no answer, Gratianus said in his usual vehement manner, "I am sure that the Saint would be glad if, now that he is dead, he relieved by his wealth the wants of the poor." The priest, directly he heard him, began to knit his brow, to put out his lips, and to look at us with the eyes of a Gorgon, and I do not doubt that he would have driven us out of the church with very violent abuse, if he had not known that we had letters of introduction from the Archbishop. I contrived, however, to appease his anger by an apology, saying that Gratianus did not mean what he said, but was only joking in his usual manner, and I at the same time gave him money.

Men.—I highly commend your piety. I sometimes, however, think seriously how it can be said that *they* have not been guilty of a crime who do not set any bounds to themselves, and spend so much money in the erection, adornment, and enriching of churches. I admit, in regard to the sacred vestments and the vessels of the church, that a proper respect should be paid to the solemnity of public worship. I think, also, that the structure should have a grandeur peculiar to itself. But what is the use of so many holy water vessels, so many candlesticks, so many golden images? Why should so much money be spent upon the organs, as they call them? For we are not satisfied with one organ in a church. Is it fitting that so great an expense should be incurred for all this musical noise, when in the meantime our brothers and sisters and the living temples of Christ are perishing from hunger and thirst?

Og.—In these matters all pious and wise men wish for moderation; but since it is a fault which arises from un-

bounded piety, we may well excuse it, especially when we think of the opposite conduct of those who despoil the churches of their wealth. The money just referred to is generally given by kings and great men, and it would be much worse spent in gambling or in war. If you take away any of this wealth, first of all it is considered an act of sacrilege ; then those who usually give, hold their hands ; then we are told that we may plunder the churches. We must remember too that these men are rather the guardians than the owners of all this wealth. I would rather see a church remarkable for the magnificence of its sacred furniture, than like some, which are bare and mean, and resemble stables more than churches.

Men.—But we read of bishops in former days who were commended because they sold the sacred vessels, and applied the money to the relief of the poor.

Og.—They are still praised, but we do nothing more than praise them. We have not the liberty to imitate them, and it would not, I think, be a pleasure to us to do so.

Men.—I am interrupting you ; I want to hear the end of your story.

Og.—I will now finish in a few words. The Head of all these priests then came to us.

Men.—Who ? the Abbot ?

Og.—He has the mitre and income, but he has not the name of an Abbot. He is called a Prior, because the Archbishop is really the Abbot. For in ancient times every Archbishop was an Abbot and a monk.

Men.—I should not object to being called a camel if I had the wealth of an Abbot.*

Og.—He seemed to me a pious and wise man, not unacquainted with the theology of the Scotists. He opened to

* Thomas Goldworthy was the last Prior of Canterbury.

us a chest in which the remainder of the body of the Saint is said to rest.

Men.—Did you see the bones?

Og.—You are not allowed to do so, and it would not be possible to see them without ladders; but we saw a golden shrine covered with a wooden canopy, which, having been raised by ropes, disclosed very valuable treasures.

Men.—What do you mean?

Og.—The gold formed the least valuable part of them.* We also saw rare and very large jewels which sparkled and glittered. Some of them were larger than the eggs of a goose. Several monks stood very devoutly around it; all, after the lid had been raised, worshipped them. The Prior with a white wand touched each jewel, mentioning the name in French, its value, and the name of the giver. The best had been presented by kings.†

Men.—He must have had a remarkable memory.

Og.—You are quite right; but constant practice is a great help, for he often does it. Then he brought us back to the crypt. The Virgin Mother has her abode there; but it is rather dark, and is quite surrounded with more than one iron screen.

Men.—What is she afraid of?

Og.—Of nothing, I should think, but thieves. For I never saw any place which more abounded in wealth.‡

* The German herald of Charles V. said that it was impossible to describe its preciousness from the value of its rings and innumerable gems. These were borrowed by Edward III. for his expedition to France.

† Among them were two jewels, given as his ransom by the King of France, and worth 10,000 crowns. Louis VII., of France, gave, in 1177, the regal diamond of France, which Henry VIII. converted into a thumb-ring.

‡ When Henry VIII., in 1538, attacked the Church, from the spoils of St. Thomas's shrine alone, two chests were filled, so large

Men.—You say that it is concealed.

Og.—When lights were brought we saw a more than royal spectacle. . . . We were afterwards brought back to the sacristy. A box was drawn forward there covered with black leather. It was placed on the table and opened ; all then bent their knees and worshipped.

Men.—What was in it ?

Og.—Some linen rags, most of them retaining marks. With these, we were told, the Saint wiped his nose, the sweat from his face or neck, or the dirt from other parts of his body. Again my friend Gratianus was very rude. The Prior, knowing that he was an Englishman of high station, kindly offered to him one of the rags, thinking that he was making him a present with which he would be highly delighted. But Gratianus, not at all pleased, touched it with the tips of his fingers with a look of great disgust, and contemptuously put it down, making, at the same time, a sort of whistle. For this was his way if he met with anything which displeased him. I was very much ashamed of my companion's conduct, and was afraid of the consequences. The Prior wisely took no notice of what had happened, and having offered us a cup of wine, politely took leave of us. We then proceeded towards London. Not far from Canterbury we came to a narrow, hollow, and steep lane, with a high bank on both sides, through which every traveller must pass.* On the left side of the road is a little house for old mendicants.† As soon as they see a horse-

that eight strong men could scarcely carry them on their shoulders. Nothing of less value than gold was carried away.

* Harbledown Hill, on which the pilgrims knelt down at the sight of the Cathedral, and then rose and shouted.

† St. Nicholas Lazar House, Harbledown, one mile from the west gate of the city. It retains a gate-house and chapel of the 11th century.

man approaching, one runs out and sprinkles him with holy water, and then offers him the upper leather of a shoe, with a brass ring in it, in which there is a glass like a jewel. Pilgrims are expected to kiss it, and to give a small piece of money. Gratianus rode on my left hand, and was nearest to the house. He bore tolerably well the sprinkling with water, but when the shoe was held out, he asked the man what was meant by it. He said that he was offering to him the shoe of St. Thomas. He became very angry, and turning to me said, "What, do these idiots want us to kiss the shoes of every good man? Nay, they will ask us to kiss their spittle, and their other abominations." I took pity on the old man, and consoled him with the present of a small piece of money.

Men.—I think that Gratianus was angry not altogether without reason. If shoes and the soles of them are kept as an evidence that those to whom they belonged led a frugal life, I should have no great fault to find; but it seems to me a great piece of impudence to thrust slippers, and shoes, and stockings, upon every one to be kissed. If, indeed, any one should do it of his own accord, from a very pious feeling, I think that he may well be excused.*

Og.—To tell you the truth, I think that it is better that these things should be left alone; but my plan is to find whatever good I can in those evils which cannot be suddenly corrected. . . .

These questions were not, as Erasmus fondly hoped, to find a peaceful solution. This satirical Colloquy, "*Peregrinatio Religionis ergo*," or "*Journey on account of Religion*," having been published and read over England and the rest of Europe, no doubt contributed to prevent the fulfilment of his wishes; for it served to expose in all their

* Thus many superstitious and idolatrous actions may be excused. This is an indulgence which the sacred Scriptures nowhere concede.

undisguised and naked deformity the superstitions of the Church of Rome, and to excite against them the indignation which is here so justly expressed by Dean Colet. In fact, his scheme of a peaceful reformation was, as we shall see hereafter, a mere chimera. We can have very little doubt that the state of things disclosed in this Colloquy, which, it appears very plainly from the note on Walsingham as to the queries prepared by the visitors sent by Henry VIII., that the monarch had read, led to a closer examination of matters in the Priory, and to the discovery of that forging of relics and feigning of miracles which caused the royal order to be issued twenty-five years later, for the public burning of the image of the Virgin at Chelsea, and to the ridiculous summons issued about the same time by Henry, at Canterbury, to the dead Archbishop to answer to a charge of treason, to the burning of his bones, and to the confiscation to the king's uses of the brooches, gems, orient pearls, chains, and gold which Erasmus describes as unfolded to his astonished view.

CHAPTER VI.

JOURNEY TO BASLE FOR THE PRINTING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ST. JEROME—MISTAKEN ESTIMATE OF POPE LEO—REASONS FOR ABANDONING THE IDEA OF SETTLING IN ENGLAND—CHARACTER AND OPINIONS OF MORE AND COLET.—(A.D. 1514—16.)

THE object of Erasmus in taking his departure from England was, that he might have his Greek New Testament and the works of St. Jerome published at Basle by Froben, the printer. In the beginning of July, 1514, we find him at Hammes Castle, near Calais, with his friend, Lord Mountjoy, from which he wrote to Servatius the letter already referred to, containing the reasons for his refusal to comply with his request, and return to a monastery.* In this letter he informs him that Spain, Italy, Germany, France, England, and Scotland were inviting him to become their guest. "There is no Cardinal at Rome," he adds, "who is not willing to receive me as a brother. . . . This honour I owe not to my wealth, which I neither have nor wish for; nor to my ambition, a passion to which I have always been a perfect stranger; but to my learning, which our countrymen ridicule, but the Italians worship. In England there is not

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1527, edit. Lugd.

a Bishop who does not delight in being addressed by me, who is not anxious to have me as a guest, or to reside in his house." Then follows the description of the kindly feelings of the King and Archbishop towards him, which has been already given.* He adds, "I must now say a few words about my works. I think that you have read the *Enchiridion*, by which not a few admit that they have been encouraged to the pursuit of piety. I take no merit to myself; but I thank Christ, and attribute to Him any good which it may have done. . . . For these last two years, besides many other things, I have corrected the text of the *Epistles of St. Jerome*. . . . By a collation of Greek and ancient manuscripts, I have corrected the text of the whole of the *New Testament*, and I have made annotations on more than a thousand passages, which will be of use to theologians. I have begun *Commentaries on St. Paul's Epistles*, which I will finish as soon as I have published the other works; for it is my purpose to spend my life in the pursuit of sacred learning. . . . I must now go to Germany—that is, to Basle—to publish my lucubrations."

He wrote the following letter on the same day to his friend Ammonius, in which he informs him that he had again fallen into the hands of the Custom-house officers:†—"I have had a safe passage. We sailed at seven o'clock—a most convenient hour. The sea was quite calm; the wind favourable; the sky bright. I suffered, however, greatly from anxiety; for those pirates carried off my baggage, in which were my lucubrations, to another vessel. They did it with the design of stealing something, if possible; or at all events of extorting from me some coins by selling me my property. When therefore I thought that what had cost me the labour of so many years was lost altogether, I

* See pages 106, 107.

† *Op. tom. iii. p. 307, edit. Bas.*

felt as much grief as a mother when death has deprived her of her children. In all other matters, too, they treat strangers in such a manner that it is better for them to fall into the hands of the Turks. I often wonder that wretches of this kind are tolerated by the Kings of England, for they cause great annoyance to visitors. They also bring a disgrace upon the whole island, for every one relates in his own country the bad treatment he has experienced, and others form their idea of the nation from the conduct of these men. I do not know whether I have told you that the King himself has dismissed me in the kindest possible manner, and that the Bishop of Lincoln* told me that I might certainly entertain very good hopes for the future. He did not, however, make me any present, nor did I venture to mention the matter to him, for I fancied that he would think me impertinent. The Bishop of Durham gave me on my departure six angels, and that, too, of his own accord. The Archbishop sought the opportunity of making me a similar present; the Bishop of Rochester treated me like a king. I carry all that they gave with me. I wish you to know this, that no one may think that I have made my journey a pretext for raising a large sum of money. If fortune should smile upon me, and people keep their word, I shall soon return to England."

I shall not describe minutely the journey from Calais to Basle, which he made, as usual, on horseback. Near Ghent, while he was stooping on one side to speak to his servant, his horse shied to the other side at some clothes spread in the path to dry. The consequence was that, in endeavouring to keep his seat, he gave his back a violent wrench, which caused him excruciating agony. He arrived with difficulty at the inn at Ghent, where he thought that he must soon die. But, as he told his friend, Mountjoy, in consequence of a vow made to St. Paul that, if he recovered he would finish

* Wolsey.

his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, he found the next morning that he was quite well, and was able to proceed on his journey.* He thus showed that even the most exalted minds cannot cast off the influences of the superstitions by which they are surrounded.

We find from his letters that he received everywhere unmistakable proofs of the esteem in which he was held ; that at Maintz, as he informed Colet, much was made of him ; that at Strasburg he was^rentertained by several distinguished men of learning ; and that the chief men of Schelestadt paid the same respect to him as if he had been a person of the first rank. Having heard that he was coming, they sent him a present of wine, and asked him to dine with them on the following day. He showed his gratitude by celebrating the praises of the city in a short poem.† He then went to Basle, accompanied by John Sapidus, the pupil of his friend Wimphelingus, formerly Professor of Divinity at Heidelberg. As he did not wish to be annoyed by the notice of strangers, he told Sapidus to conceal his name, adding that he wanted only a few^rselect friends at Basle. He thus writes to his friend Wimphelingus :—“ At first, in consequence of what I said to him, I was introduced to those only whom I most wished to see. Here is Beatus Rhenanus, with whose prudence and retiring disposition, as well as judgment in matters of learning, I am greatly delighted. I much enjoy the daily intercourse that I have with him. Here is Gerard Lystrius, a young man well acquainted with the art^r of medicine, and with the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages, who is quite devoted to me. Here is also Bruno Amerbach, a man of great learning, who also knows the same three languages. I gave John Froben a letter from Erasmus, adding that I was very intimate indeed

* Op. tom. iii. ep. 182, edit. Lugd.

† “ Encomium Slestadii.” Op. tom. i. p. 1223, edit. Lugd.

with him, that I had been appointed by him to make arrangements for the publication of his books, and that he was to consider whatever I did as done by Erasmus himself. I then said that I was so like Erasmus, that he who had seen the one had seen the other. He now, to his very great amusement, discovered the trick which had been played upon him. Froben's father-in-law then paid all that we owed at the inn, and received us with our horses and baggage into his house."*

The person just mentioned was John Amerbach, who, with his three sons and Froben, superintended the printing-press at Basle. The first, who was now considerably advanced in life, was unable to take an active part in the business; but the last four, with Beatus Rhenanus for a corrector of the press, from a pure love of the work, devoted all their energies to the publication of the lucubrations of Erasmus. The latter was so much interrupted by visits from learned men at Basle, and by invitations to dinner, that at last he was obliged to decline society altogether. He says, in a letter to his friend, Lord Mountjoy, written at the end of August, "that Germany had received him with so much honour, that he was almost put to the blush." He adds, "that now shut up, he was superintending the printing of his trifles, engaged with no less zeal in the matter in question than the Emperor in his war with Venice."†

Erasmus had been continually urged by his friends in Italy, especially by Cardinal Grimanus—his introduction to whom has been described in a former chapter—to spend a short time in that country. Instead, however, of doing so he left Basle, and arrived in England in the spring of 1515. He wrote to the Cardinal, after his arrival, the following apology:‡

* Letter to Wimphelingus. Jortin, vol. ii. p. 457.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 285, edit. Bas.

‡ Ibid., p. 65.

“You must not suppose that in not coming to your Excellency after my first and last meeting, as you had directed and I promised, I intended to put a slight upon you. Your own refinement and courteous manners are the cause of my apparent neglect of you. You will ask for an explanation of so strange a statement. I will give it to you plainly, and as a German ought to do—frankly. At the time you invited me, it was my intention to pay a visit to Britain. To this land I was bound by old ties of affection. I was drawn to it also by the very large promises of powerful friends, as well as by the very kindly feelings of the most prosperous of kings towards me. I had adopted this island as my country, and had chosen it as the home of my old age. I was invited—nay, urged—to come to it by many letters, in which a promise of mountains of gold was made to me. From these promises I had formed the idea of an amount of wealth, such as I should think could scarcely be washed down by ten Pactoli. I was afraid therefore that if I returned to your Highness I should be led to change my purpose. For when, by one conversation with you, you so captivated me, what would you have done if I had held frequent and closer intercourse with you? For your great amiability, your persuasive eloquence, your admirable learning, the assurance of having your friendly advice on which I could fully rely, would move even a heart of iron. . . . I found, therefore, the love for your city, which I had with difficulty shaken off, again slowly increasing. It was such that if I had not before left Rome suddenly, I should never have left it at all. I tore myself away therefore, that I might not afterwards be prevented from going, and flew to England, rather than proceeded on my journey to it. . . . I cannot fail to have a strong desire for Rome, when I think of the numerous advantages connected with that city. First of all, it is the most celebrated city on the face of the earth; it is the light of the world, and the high

stage on which the eyes of men are fixed. I should enjoy, too, there, perfect freedom, the most delightful of all blessings. I should have the great advantage of many libraries rich in literary wealth, as well as of an acquaintance with many men of learning, and of most agreeable conversations with them; I should be surrounded by so many monuments of antiquity, and I should find so many lights of the world gathered together in one place." . . . He concludes his letter by telling him that Rome should see him the next winter if God, the King, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, should allow him to leave England.

The following is an extract from his letter to Cardinal St. George, written at the same time* :—

"I have never, in the midst of the tumult of war, discontinued my literary labours. I have published, among many other things, my work on the 'Adages,' which I have carefully corrected, and so enlarged that I have added to it the fourth part of a volume. The whole of the works of St. Jerome are being printed. I should rather say that he is having a second birth given to him; for he was so corrupted and mutilated, that he does not seem so much restored, as now published for the first time. A great work is being printed, intended to be, as it was before, in ten volumes; and with so much care, and at so great an expense, that I will venture to affirm that for the last twenty years no work as expensive, or on which an equal amount of care has been bestowed, has issued from that printing-press. . . . Last year I stayed eight months at Basle for this very purpose. I have been during that time at a very great expense. In the next autumn I will certainly revisit Italy, that I may examine your very rich libraries. . . . I wish to be guided by your advice as to whom I should dedicate this work. I owe much to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he is very deserving of the honour of having his name inscribed on my

* Op. tom. iii. p. 70, edit. Bas.

page. . . . I see also that the dedication to Leo will be a great recommendation to my work, and that it will be a great honour to him. . . .”

The following is part of a fulsome letter to Pope Leo, written shortly after this time :* “ I see everywhere, I hear everywhere throughout Christendom, that the highest and the lowest congratulate themselves on having such a Prince. All indeed most justly praise you, but none have better reason for doing so than those who are influenced by a love of true piety and polite learning ; for the noble and immortal family of the Medici, to whom the world is indebted for Leo, has always been the nurse of men remarkable for their virtues and for their literary excellence. To your great natural genius has been added the advantage of a very good education ; you have also had for your instructor, Politian, a man remarkable for his refinement, who was far better able than any one else to draw out the abilities with which you are happily gifted.”

He afterwards gave him an account of his literary labours.

“ I have worked so hard to give a new life to St. Jerome, that I have almost killed myself. I may, without the least hesitation, solemnly declare that it has cost Jerome less trouble to write his own works than it has cost me to restore and illustrate them. The work has been carried on for some time with great ardour. Jerome will have his second birth at the celebrated city of Basle, in Switzerland, in the printing establishment of Froben. There is not a more careful one anywhere, nor one from which a greater number of good books issue, especially those which relate to sacred literature. This is not the work of one person, nor has one man money enough for it ; several very learned men have long worked very hard at it. The three brothers

* Op. tom. iii. p. 63, edit. Bas.

Amerbach have given me most assistance. They, chiefly, have carried it on, having shared the expense and trouble with Froben. This family has been well prepared by the fates themselves for the work of giving a new life to St. Jerome. Their father, a most excellent man, has taken care to have his sons instructed in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. He, in the decline of life, has left this work as a kind of inheritance to his children, devoting whatever money he has to the undertaking. And these excellent young men discharge diligently the duties entrusted to them by their father. But your Holiness will say, 'What is all this to me?' I answer that there is no one more highly commended, no one more celebrated than Jerome; but yet I see very plainly how much honour, how much weight, your name will bring to him. The glory of Leo is very great, and yet there will be, if I am not mistaken, no little addition to it if so rare, so vast, so celebrated a work, as it were born again, should go forth to the world under your auspices. And it seems to be very proper that all the branches of learning which are the offspring of peace, should flourish again by means of that Pontiff who has procured for the world literary leisure, and peace, the foster-mother of learning."

This letter was doubtless written by Erasmus for the purpose of ingratiating himself with the Pope. The latter sent to him a very courteous answer;* but only gave him the assurance that if he should have the opportunity, he would extend to him his bounty hereafter. Erasmus did not dedicate St. Jerome to him, probably because he was disgusted with him on account of the coldness of this answer; but, as he had at first intended, to Archbishop Warham. Leo gave a plain proof soon after this time that he did not wish Erasmus to take up his abode at Rome, for he

* Op. tom. iii. p. 72, edit. Bas.

wrote a letter to Henry VIII., from which we gather that it was his desire that the King should give him preferment rather than himself. He spoke in the highest terms of him as a man of learning, and endeavoured to interest Henry in his favour by informing him that Erasmus had, in a recent letter, highly commended him for his magnanimity and his numerous virtues.*

After having read the condemnation of the Popes as a class in the "Praise of Folly," we shall perhaps be surprised at the exalted opinion of Leo which Erasmus expresses at the beginning of his letter, and shall imagine that he is here addressing him in the language of unmeaning compliment. But Erasmus deluded himself with the idea that he had at the time in question good reason for thus extolling him. He had, as we have seen, lashed most severely Alexander VI. and Julius II. in his "Praise of Folly;" the one, because his character was stained with all those vices which disgrace human nature, and place a man on a level with the beasts that perish: the other, because he was constantly flinging wide his standard to the winds, and plunging his country into war, with a view simply to the gratification of his inordinate ambition. But Leo seemed to be influenced by motives and animated by feelings of a totally opposite character. "Let Julius," he said, in writing on the proverb, '*Dulce bellum inexpertis*,'† "have his magnificent triumphs. It is not for the like of me to say how far they become the Head of the Christian Church. Leo will gain far greater glory by the restoration of peace, than Julius by the bravery which he has shown in the numerous wars he has carried on throughout the world, or has brought to a successful termination." He seemed, in fact, to Erasmus, to have risen on Christendom with the benignant influence

* Op. tom. iii. p. 73, edit. Bas.

† Op. tom. ii. p. 970, edit. Lugd.

of a vernal sun after a long and dreary night of storms ; while civilization, knowledge, and humanity revived with returning day. Under his reign, a golden age seemed to have begun in Europe. Leo was eminently the advocate of a peaceful policy. He had stilled the tempest of war ; he had brought mighty kings, who were before bitter enemies to one another, into fraternal union. He had induced Henry VIII. to lay down his arms ; he had persuaded Louis, King of France, to allow him to arbitrate between him and his enemies. He had also restored to their country many Italian princes who had been driven into exile.* This Pope was likewise the bitter opponent of the scholastic theology. He was also the great patron of polite learning. "Under such a prince," wrote Erasmus, "as at a given signal, all in the world who are renowned for their learning, or remarkable for their piety, are hastening to Rome as to a theatre."†

But Erasmus was doomed to disappointment. He did, indeed, declare his belief that "the authority of the Scriptures will not suffer, if corrupt readings be removed from them, corrections be made in the text, and the right sense be given to them ;" but still he could not refrain from expressing his fears lest, "under the pretext of the revival of ancient literature, Paganism should endeavour to raise its head, for there are amongst Christians those who acknowledge Christ only by name, but breathe the spirit of the heathen world."‡ He has combated this evil, as we shall see hereafter, in the Preface to his "*Novum Instrumentum*." His fears were fully realized. The character of that period has been well described by Lord Macaulay. "The more respectable members of the Court of Rome were utterly unfit

* Letter to Leo. Op. tom. iii. p. 64, edit. Bas.

† Letter to Car. Grimanus. Ibid., p. 69.

‡ Epist. Gwolfgango Fabricio Capitoni. Op. tom. iii. p. 10, edit. Bas.

to be ministers of religion. They were men like Leo X.; men who with the Latinity of the Augustan age, had acquired its atheistical and scoffing spirit. Their years glided by in a soft dream of sensual and intellectual voluptuousness. Choice cookery, delicious wines, lovely women, hounds, falcons, horses, newly-discovered manuscripts of the classics, sonnets, and burlesque romances in the sweetest Tuscan, just as licentious as a fine sense of the graceful would permit, plate from the hand of Benvenuto, designs for palaces by Michael Angelo, frescoes by Raphael, busts, mosaics, and gems just dug up from among the ruins of ancient temples and villas, these things were the delight and even the serious business of their lives. The highest praise of the chiefs of the Church was that they were good judges of Latin composition, of paintings, and statues; but their severest studies had a Pagan character, and they were suspected of laughing in secret at the sacraments which they administered, and of believing no more of the Gospel than of the *Morgante Maggiore*.* Erasmus has expressed his astonishment at the blasphemies of these men of learning. They sought to prove out of Pliny that there is no difference between the souls of men and those of brutes.† Many professed a belief in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, while they denied the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. Some even dared to call in question the great doctrine of the soul's immortality.

I have little to add to Lord Macaulay's eloquent language. Every syllable of it may be applied to Leo X. The careful student of history knows well that, even as a man of learning, he did not deserve the eulogium which Erasmus here pronounces upon him. He may indeed have been a patron of learned men; but, as he was excessively indo-

* Macaulay's *Essay on Ranke's "History of the Popes."*

† Burigny, *"Life of Erasmus,"* vol. i. p. 139.

lent, and much given to luxurious indulgence, he cannot really have made much progress in a knowledge of polite literature. The adulation of Erasmus and others may have served to delude him with the idea that he had that taste and knowledge which they ascribed to him. Though he did not possess the warlike ambition of Julius, or exhibit the savage qualities and coarse debauchery of Borgia, yet he was, on account of his scoffing spirit and his vices, as unfit for the pastoral office as these men, or the worst of his predecessors. He was a voluptuary to the end of his days. He impaired his faculties and shortened his life by his excesses. Multitudes had learnt to despise his pretensions to the sacred character with which he was invested. Erasmus was deluding himself when he supposed that Leo would be the instrument of regenerating human society. A peaceful reformation, to be gradually accomplished by the progress of learning, was in fact a mere chimera. Literature never can be the means of enabling men to cast off the formalism and superstition of ages, and of bringing them into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ maketh His people free.

Erasmus seems to have left England on his return to Basle before the end of the summer of 1515. He spent a short time here in the autumn of 1516, and in the spring of 1517; this was his last visit to this country. We shall be surprised that this should have been the case when we remember that he fully intended to make England the home of his old age. But we find that afterwards he could not carry that intention into effect. At first, indeed, the warlike schemes of Henry VIII. were the cause of his departure from our shores. The liberality of his patrons became less on account of the war taxes which they had to pay. The House of Commons had too readily granted Henry a subsidy to enable him to arrest Louis XII. of France in his

victorious career. The consequence was that his friends in this country had neither leisure nor inclination to attend to the literary schemes of Erasmus. He said in his letter to Cardinal Grimanus, "Though my good fortune in England has been greater than I deserved, yet it has not been altogether such as I expected, nor as my friends had promised me."* These promises probably existed chiefly in his own imagination. Again, writing to Cardinal St. George, he said, "I had formed in my mind the idea of streams flowing to me producing more gold than Pactolus or Tagus. But the storm of war very soon came and carried off the King himself, the father of the golden age, and my other friends from the muses. The trumpet of Julian had so roused the whole world to arms."†

Those warlike operations continued for some time. I need not describe them minutely. Suffice it to observe that Henry VIII., after having in his first expedition against France failed disgracefully, and after having in his second taken only two unimportant towns, had concluded a treaty with Louis, and had given in marriage to him his sister, the Princess Mary, who, according to contract, ought to have been long since married to Henry's former ally, Prince Charles. Then, after having undertaken to assist Louis in regaining the province of Navarre, which he had lately aided his ally Ferdinand in conquering, he entered once more after the death of the former into a secret alliance with Ferdinand, the object of which was to humble the pride of his successor, Francis I.

Erasmus gave the plainest proof that though a student, he was alive to passing events, by condemning in the strongest language the conduct of these monarchs. In the new edition of the "Adages," which, as I have said, Froben was publishing, the following severe words are to be found: "Kings

* Op. tom. iii. p. 68, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., p. 71.

who are scarcely men are called 'divine;' they are 'invincible,' though they have never left the battle-field without being conquered; 'serene,' though they have turned the world upside down in a tumult of wars; 'illustrious,' though they grovel in profoundest ignorance of everything noble; 'Catholic,' though they follow anything rather than Christ."* No doubt the inherent baseness of this conduct, the political dishonesty which it displayed, were the principal reasons for the stern rebuke here administered. But the considerations mentioned above gave additional bitterness to it. He was obliged to become an exile from the land of his adoption. He had lost the means of support which he expected. The attempts of Erasmus to propitiate Henry VIII., who, as we have seen, was very favourably disposed towards him, by dedications, in one of which he reminded him of their early intimacy, and subsequently by his vindication of the King's authorship of the famous answer to Luther, failed of the wished-for success. Henry probably felt more deeply the loss of Erasmus when his country was deprived of the fame which she might have acquired by his residence in it. Perhaps, also, the treatment which he received from Wolsey was one of his reasons for not taking up his abode permanently in England. Erasmus may have become acquainted with him at Oxford, where he was bursar of Magdalen College. He had dedicated to him not only a piece of Plutarch relating to the benefit which we may gain from our enemies, but also his Paraphrase on the Epistles of St. Peter. From the latter I extract the following passage, which seems to show his exalted opinion of the Cardinal as a patron of learning. "Besides many men eminent for their erudition, there are now growing up in Britain under your patronage several

* See the proverb "The beetle pursues the eagle." Op. tom. ii. p. 869, edit. Lugd.

young men of very great promise, who will hereafter become more distinguished even than the former, if the gentle gale of your favour shall breathe upon them.”* Wolsey actually offered to Erasmus a canonry of Tournay, of which See he was bishop. Though he had no great wish for preferment of this kind, he was eager to hold it, because his friend, Lord Mountjoy, was governor of the city. But when the instrument for his installation had been signed by the Cardinal, and when the canons were congratulating themselves on the certainty of having this distinguished man as a member of their body, he gave it to another person. The Cardinal assigned as his reason for this disappointment that he intended to give him better preferment. But he never fulfilled that promise. He gave him, indeed, a small pension out of the church of York, which was very far from being an adequate reward of his merits, and he promised him a bishopric. But Erasmus justly regarded that promise as implying an intention to evade the payment of a part of what was due to him.† He afterwards spoke in a very bitter tone of the Cardinal, and of his false promises. “I have dedicated,” he wrote, “to the Cardinal of York my work on Plutarch, and yet I have not become a farthing richer by his munificence.”‡ He had told him in his letters that he had fixed the anchor of his happiness upon him, and that he would hasten his return, if, in the meantime, he would be generous enough to provide him with the means of refreshing mind and body, wearied with hard work.§ But he soon ceased to depend upon him.

* Eras. Paraph. tom. ii. p. 666, edit. Bas. 1534.

† Knight's “Life of Erasmus,” p. 376.

‡ Erasmus Catalogus Operum ab ipso conscriptus, tomo primo præfixus, edit. Bas.

§ Erasmi Epist. Tho. Card. Ebor. Op. tom. iii. p. 1811, edit. Lugd.

We must not suppose, however, that Erasmus was guilty of servile adulation either of Wolsey or of his royal master. On the contrary, his letters to both are expressed in language of familiarity, as well as of respect, and show very plainly that he considers that by his correspondence he is conferring an honour *upon* them, as well as receiving it *from* them. No doubt the change observable in the way in which he spoke of Wolsey is to be attributed to the unbounded arrogance which he displayed some time before his fall. He said in his letters that he was not civil nor easy of access to his inferiors; he pitied his friends for the hardships which he imposed upon them; and added that he was feared by all, but beloved by few or none.* Probably the sense of unjust treatment by him from which he smarted, imparted additional bitterness to the language which he used regarding him. Erasmus, however, did not reflect that he had himself stood in the way of his own advancement. The Papal throne had been for many years the great object of Wolsey's ambition. But Erasmus had endeavoured to shake it to its very foundation. If he had really wished to secure the goodwill of the great Cardinal, he should not have laughed to scorn, with good reason indeed, but still not wisely for his own interests, the claims of the schoolmen, of whose philosophy Wolsey was the warm advocate, to be the theological dictators of Christendom; he should not have made himself a heretic in his estimation by condemning the corrupt practices of the Church of Rome in language which seemed to imply that he considered her the Apocalyptic "mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

Thus, then, it seems not unlikely that Wolsey, by withholding from Erasmus, for the reasons just given, the royal patronage of which he was, in fact, the dispenser, having really more power over it than the King himself, may have

* Knight's "Life of Erasmus," p. 378.

been partly the cause of his unwillingness and inability to reside permanently in England. He had reason, as he said in a letter to a friend, to be sorry that he had come to this country, and that he had refused better offers in foreign lands.*

Erasmus would be deeply grieved that he was compelled to depart from England, because personal intercourse with the friends whom he so dearly loved could now exist only in the memory of days gone by. I have already fully described the nature of the union between himself and Dean Colet. He it was who taught him to lift up his voice against the scholastic philosophy, to adopt the common sense historical method of interpreting the Scriptures, and to draw his lessons directly from St. Paul and the Gospels. In a letter written in August, 1514, prefixed to a collection of different pieces, including the *Institutes of a Christian Man*, which, having been written by Colet for the use of his school in English prose, had been turned into Latin verse by Erasmus, he spoke of him as "a man than whom, in my opinion, the kingdom of England has not another more pious, or who more truly knows Christ."† He was bound to him also by the love of polite letters, and by the desire to improve education. In the letter already referred to, written to Servatius in the same year, he described him as a man much esteemed by every one, who united the greatest learning with admirable piety. He added, "He, as all know, has so great an affection for me, that there is no one with whom he likes to live better than with me."‡

* *Epist. Ad. Principi Veriano*, op. tom. iii. p. 122, edit. Lugd. Quoties poenitet me fortunam quam ante triennium mihi Lovanii offerebas, non amplexum fuisse.

† Seebohm's "*Oxford Reformers*," p. 300. Stray pieces, including "*The Institutes of a Christian Man*," written by Colet.

‡ *Op. tom. iii. p. 1527*, edit. Lugd.

How deep was his sorrow when, in 1519, two years after his last visit to England, he heard of his death, the following extracts from letters to his friends bear full testimony. "O true theologian! O wonderful preacher of evangelical doctrine! with what earnest zeal did he drink in the philosophy of Christ! How eagerly did he imbibe the spirit and feelings of St. Paul! How did the purity of his whole life correspond to his heavenly doctrine?" Again, writing to Bishop Fisher :* "I have written this weeping for Colet's death. . . . I know it is all right with him who, escaped from this evil and wretched world, is in present enjoyment of that Christ whom he loved so well when alive. I cannot help mourning in the public name the loss of so rare an example of Christian piety, so remarkable a preacher of Christian truth."†

Erasmus would also feel deeply his separation from Thomas More, whose gentle and endearing character had exercised a fascinating influence over him, as, indeed, over all with whom he held social and domestic intercourse. His genial playfulness, and his love of real wit and sportive raillery, formed a bond of union between him and one who, as we see from his "Praise of Folly," and his other works, was very skilful in the use of those weapons. More also greatly admired the boundless learning of Erasmus. The following extract from a letter from the latter to Hutten, written in 1519, two years after his last visit to England, will give the best idea of his character at that time.‡ "If you want a perfect pattern of real friendship, you must look for it in More. He has so much affability, and suavity of manner, that there is no one, however morose may be

* Letter to Lupset, Seebohm's translation, "Oxford Reformers," p. 504.

† Seebohm's translation, *ibid.*

‡ Erasmus Ulrichi Hutteno. Op. tom. iii. p. 472, edit. Lugd.

his disposition, whom he does not make cheerful. . . . From his early boyhood he has been so accustomed to joking, that it seems natural to him ; but yet he never descends to buffoonery, and is very careful not to hurt anybody's feelings by it. . . . There is nothing in the world, however serious it may be, from which he does not extract pleasantry. If he has intercourse with wise and learned men, he is delighted with their genius ; if with unlearned and foolish men, he enjoys their folly. . . . No one is less swayed by the opinion of the world, and no one is more remarkable for his common sense. A great pleasure it is to him to consider the form, the disposition, the affections of different animals. He has every kind of bird in his house, and every rare animal, as the ape, the fox, the ferret, and the weasel. . . . From early life he has loved polite literature. When he was a young man, he applied himself to the Greek language and to philosophical studies. His father, who was in other respects a wise and prudent man, was so far from assisting him in them, that when he began them he took away his pecuniary allowance, and almost disowned him, because he seemed unwilling to follow his own legal studies. Although, and with reason, his mind revolted from them, yet he so applied himself to them that suitors chose him as their advocate to conduct their causes, and his income was larger than that of any lawyer. He was also diligent in the study of volumes having reference to the orthodox faith. When he was quite a young man he gave public lectures on St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei* to a crowded audience, and priests and old men were not ashamed to be instructed in sacred things by a young layman. In the meantime he applied his mind altogether to the duties of religion, to watchings, fastings, and prayers. Nothing but the wish to marry prevented him from devot-

ing himself altogether to this kind of life. He wished rather to be a chaste husband than an unholy priest."

Erasmus then goes on to tell his friend that More had married a gentle girl, of good family, brought up in the retirement of the country with her parents and sisters, whom he had endeavoured to educate according to his own tastes ; that he had instructed her in literature and every kind of music, in the fond hope that she would be his companion through life ; that she had been carried off by an early death, leaving three daughters and a son, Margaret, Alice, Cicely, and John ; that a few months after her death, More, with a view to the care of his family, rather than to any pleasure which he derived from the marriage, had taken for his partner one who was neither beautiful nor a maiden, as he used jokingly to tell her ; that from regard to More's musical tastes, she had learned to sing and play on the harp, and that the voice of contention was never heard in this happy household.

He afterwards writes thus : "He has been more than once sent out on a foreign embassy. When His most Serene Highness, King Henry VIII., found that he had showed great diplomatic skill, he was not satisfied till he had dragged him into his service. Yes, dragged, I say, for no one ever tried harder to be admitted to court, than he tried to keep out of it. When this very excellent King determined to surround himself with learned, wise, discreet, and upright men, he invited a great many to come to him, but More, first of all, with whom he is so intimate, that he never allows him to leave him. If he wishes to discuss serious matters, he goes to him at once for his opinion ; if on the other hand he wishes to have the diversion of agreeable stories, he finds him a very pleasant companion. . . . No one has ever induced him to accept a present. He is altogether without pride. In the midst of these weighty

affairs he remembers his old friends, and returns to his beloved literature. He employs all the influence arising from his high office, and from his connection with a very powerful King, in assisting his friends, and in promoting the best interests of the state. Some he assists with money; others, by his influence; others, by giving them a recommendation. If there are any whom he cannot assist in any other way, he gives them good advice; he never sends away any without having comforted them. You would say that More was the public patron of all poor men. . . .”

He again makes mention of his studies, which he describes as the principal bond of union between them. He informs Hutten that in the early part of his life he was very fond of poetry; that afterwards, by careful practice in every kind of writing, he endeavoured to make his prose style more agreeable; that he delighted much in declamation; and that, at More's suggestion, as we have already seen, in order that he might ascertain whether he had improved in this art, they both wrote a full answer to Lucian's arguments in favour of tyrannicide. He thus continues: “He published ‘Utopia’ for the purpose of showing the causes of the decline of kingdoms. He had, however, Britain chiefly in view, the condition of which he has examined, and knows very well. He wrote the second book first in his leisure moments; afterwards as opportunity offered, he added the first, which has a direct bearing on the times. . . . You will not find a person who is more successful in anything of this description; for a happy mode of expression aids the efforts of his genius. He is very acute in disputations, so that he often comes into the theological arena, and does the work of our greatest divines. John Colet, a man of shrewdness and accurate judgment, says of him in conversation, that there is but one genius in England, and that his name is Thomas More, though, indeed,

there are many distinguished for their learning.' He is a man of real piety, very remote from all superstition, and has his fixed hours when he prays to God, not in a formal manner, but in language which comes from the heart. He converses in such a manner with his friends respecting the world to come, that you see at once that he is conversing on a favourite topic, and that he has a hope full of immortality. Such is More even at court." . . .

The "Utopia" here mentioned was the greatest of More's works. Erasmus correctly stated his object in writing it. It was to show the contrast between its imaginary commonwealth and the governments existing in Europe, and especially in England, at the time of its publication. Thus, while the other nations in those distant regions, their neighbours, are constantly breaking the most solemn treaties, the Utopians never enter into a treaty at all, thinking that words are altogether unnecessary when any one is determined to disregard the natural tie existing between man and man. Again, unlike almost every nation, they regard war with a religious abhorrence, deeming that they cover themselves with infamy by needlessly engaging in it. More is evidently, in the whole of the passage just referred to, with the most refined irony, administering a sharp rebuke to the Pope, Henry VIII., and the other monarchs of Europe; for he says that they religiously observe their treaties. He attributes that observance entirely to the good example set them by the Popes, and to the severity with which they prosecuted all who were guilty of perfidy. Now, as we have seen, the very contrary was the case. They constantly violated their engagements, and without any justifying pretext, plunged their countries into bloody wars, because they were inflamed with a thirst for military glory. Erasmus had already, as we have seen, in the "Praise of Folly," made the Popes and the European mon-

arches the objects of his satire. In the "Christian Prince," which was published at the same time with the "Utopia," and was designed for the special benefit of Prince Charles of Castile and Arragon, afterwards the Emperor Charles V., he pursues the same line of argument as his friend.* He shows that every prince ought to aim at the promotion of the best interests of the people committed to his charge; that he ought even to retire from a war undertaken in self-defence if he find that it is prejudicial to religion, that it leads to the violation of justice, to the shedding of torrents of blood, and to a lavish expenditure; that the great object of a wise prince will be to reduce taxation as much as possible, to tax luxuries rather than necessities, and to take especial care not to tax the poor heavily; and to aim rather at the prevention than at the punishment of crime.

More shows a similar regard for the interests of the poor in his "Utopia." When he wishes to condemn Henry VIII. and the English parliament because they subjected the poor to very heavy taxation on account of the war, and because, notwithstanding the great demand for labour, they reduced their wages as much as possible, in order that the rich might not pay their proper proportion of war-taxes,—when further he wishes to censure them because they did not attempt to remove the ignorance which prevailed throughout the country, he represents all the Utopians as being in a prosperous condition, and every child in the community as properly educated. With the same enlightened regard for the interests of the poor, when he wished to indicate a remedy for the diseases which robbed the inhabitants of the crowded metropolis of their beauty, their glory, and their strength, and cut them off by thousands and tens of thousands out of the land of the living, he represents the streets

* Op. tom. iv. p. 433, edit. Bas.

of Utopia as wide, and free from those nuisances which always have been found to be a fruitful source of pestilence ; the houses and rooms as high and spacious, with many windows, so that the inhabitants are not inconveniently crowded together, and there might be, when necessary, a current of air through them ; while near them are waterworks, from which they may obtain a plentiful supply of fresh water, and behind them is a trim and well-stocked garden. Thus, then, he anticipated the nineteenth century in the suggestions of those educational and sanitary arrangements which are no longer Utopian in the sense of the word as it has been applied since More's day to the impossible schemes of brain-sick enthusiasts, but seem likely to some extent to be carried out, and to improve the moral and temporal condition of the people of England.

We may in some degree gather More's religious views from the "Utopia." We shall find that, as we shall see hereafter, they are different from those which he adopted in the later period of his life. When indeed he represents all the sects as gathered together in the solemn gloom of a temple in Utopia, with hearts free from anger and hatred, to join in a service from which everything was carefully excluded which was opposed to the prejudices or distasteful to the inclinations of the worshippers, conducted by a priest arrayed in vestments wrought of birds' plumage, we must not suppose that he imagines comprehension to that extent to be a possibility, but that he is simply condemning the endless divisions which interrupted the harmony of European Christians. We find a plain expression of his opinions on other points. He speaks in derision of the abbots as "those holy men who thought it not enough to live at their own ease, and to do no good to the public, but who resolved to do it

harm instead of good.”* He accuses the preachers of that age of “corrupting the Christian doctrine ; for they, observing that men of the world did not frame their lives according to the rules which Christ has given, have fitted His doctrine, as if it had been a leaden rule, to their lives, that in some way they might agree with one another.”† He reckons “the Friars as vagabonds, who ought to be taken up and put under restraint ;”‡ he represents the Utopians as “allowing their priests to marry ;”§ he exalts the dignity of the priesthood ;|| he banishes images from their churches ;¶ thus showing very plainly his opinion on that subject ; he informs us that the Utopians offered not divine honours to any but God alone ;”** he gives it as one of their maxims that no man ought to be punished for his religion ;†† and he exalts “a solid virtue far above all rigorous severities,”‡‡ which were the most remarkable characteristic of the piety of the age in which he lived.

We see then generally what were More’s views when he wrote the “Utopia” in 1515 and 1516. On all these points he agreed with Erasmus and Colet. He agreed with them also in their opposition to the Schoolmen, to the formalism of the monks and others, and in their determination to grasp at the spirit of religion, and to make it an actuating, energizing principle. On these points they agreed with Luther. They seemed indeed to be drawing near to him. But really, as we shall see hereafter, there was a great difference between them. They also exerted every effort to promote a political, as well as a religious reformation. Now

* “Utopia.” Edit. Bas. 1563, p. 21. The summary of his religious views here given is extracted from Burnet’s “History of the Reformation,” edit. Lond. 1715. Supplement, p. 56.

† “Utopia.” Edit. Bas. 1563, p. 56. ‡ Ibid. p. 37.

§ Ibid. p. 114. || Ibid. p. 186. ¶ Ibid. p. 192.

** Ibid. p. 173. †† Ibid. p. 191. ‡‡ Ibid. p. 130.

they were to be separated from one another. Colet was soon to be gathered to his fathers. Erasmus was only once more to visit England. If he and More met hereafter, they can only have done so when the latter went on an embassy to the Continent. The endearing sympathies so long existing between them, and the associations of tender interest which had "grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength," could now only be cherished and maintained through the imperfect medium of epistolary correspondence. But still we doubt not that they could all at the present time, under the pain occasioned by separation, derive comfort from the thought that at present they had never swerved from their views; and that they had endeavoured to promote the onward march of spiritual, moral, and political improvement.

We have thus seen the feelings with which Erasmus contemplated his separation from his beloved friends, and some of his reasons for coming to the conclusion that England could not now be "the home of his old age." At the time of his departure from England in 1515, he was, as I have stated, full of indignation on account of the warlike schemes of Henry VIII. and his brother monarchs. He felt that, to use his own words, "that revival of philosophical studies, which was designed to lead to an acquaintance with the simple and pure Christianity of the Bible,"* had been interrupted by them. His friend and coadjutor, Dean Colet, still indeed, notwithstanding the persevering efforts of his enemies to create in the King's mind a prejudice against him, continued to lift up his voice against the vices of the clergy, and to unfold the meaning of the truths of Holy Scripture in heart-stirring discourses delivered from the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral. But, when the warlike passions of the monarch were roused, he might become the

* D'Aubigné's "History of the Reformation," p. 108.

advocate of bigotry, and might silence that fearless champion of the truth. Henry and Wolsey had indeed at last offered Erasmus a house and a pension of 600 florins to induce him to settle in England; but he at length decided not to accept the proposal. He seems to have been afraid of them; for in a letter to More he says that he feared to come any more to England, lest he should be obliged to do something inconsistent with his freedom.* Thus it was that he was gradually estranged from the land of our fathers; and that he was not interred, as he might perhaps have been, in the consecrated mould of that Abbey, that national Valhalla, where the remains of many English worthies, in successive generations, have mouldered into dust.

At the end of August, 1515, he was able to announce to Cardinal Wolsey that he was again at Basle, superintending the printing of "St. Jerome" and of the "New Testament."† While he was here he received a pressing invitation from Ernest, Duke of Bavaria, to take up his abode at his University of Ingoldstadt, accompanied with the offer of a handsome salary and rich livings. He at once declined the proposal. His post of counsellor to the emperor obliged him now occasionally to be at the Flemish Court. While he was at Brussels in the autumn of 1516, he was informed that Charles had conferred on him a bishopric in Sicily, and that on finding that it was not amongst those reserved for the Crown, he had written to the Pope, asking him to give it to him.‡ He was glad, however, to hear nothing more of it. Indeed Sicily would have been nothing more than a place of exile to him; as he would have been unable, in that distant spot, to hold the same intercourse as heretofore

* *Angliae motus timeo et servitatem horreo.* Eras. ep. Moro, "Knight's Life," p. 184.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 302, edit. Bas.

‡ Eras. Ammonio, tom. iii. p. 137, edit. Lugd.

with men of learning. He had, some months previously, on March 7th, 1516, informed Urbanus Regius that the "New Testament" was published, and the last colophon put to "St. Jerome."* But these justly celebrated works demand a separate chapter.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 589, edit. Bas.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS "GREEK TESTAMENT."—(A.D. 1516).

ERASMUS had been preparing himself during many years for his work on the New Testament. In comparison with that preparation, every occupation, however, in the judgment of the world, important, or however exalted, appeared to him to sink into utter insignificance. The "new learning" was considered by him as important only so far as it was subservient to the attainment of an improved knowledge of Holy Scripture, Christian antiquity, and the lives of the Fathers. He has shown very plainly the use of classical studies. The following passage from the *Enchiridion* will explain his views on this subject :* "I would not for my part condemn any one for amusing himself with the works of the poets or of the heathen philosophers, provided he just takes them up in moderation, and at the proper age, and snatches at them, as it were, on his passage, but does not linger upon them, and grow old close to the rocks of the sirens. For St. Basil invites to these studies those young men whom he is preparing to lead the life of Christians. Our Augustine also invites his friend Licentius to enjoy the society of the Muses. Jerome is not sorry to be along with his beloved captive. Cyprian also is com-

* "Enchiridion." Op. tom. v. p. 8, edit. Bas.

mended because he enriched the temple of the Lord with the spoils of Egypt. You must take care, however, that you do not, along with a knowledge of the literature, acquire the character of the ancient heathen world. You will find in it much which prepares you for leading a good life. A certain writer very properly reminds us that Moses did not despise the advice of his father-in-law, Jethro. This learning forms and strengthens the genius of boys, and prepares them in a wonderful manner for the knowledge of Holy Scripture. . . . It would be better, however, as I have said, to engage in the study of heathen literature with moderation, with caution, and at the same time with pleasure, not too before you have attained a suitable age. You should occupy towards it the position rather of a wayfaring man, than of one who lives in a fixed abode. Lastly,—and this is a most important consideration,—all this learning should have a direct reference to Christ.”

We have seen that he had been endeavouring to gain that knowledge of the Greek language without which he could not expect to be able to explain the New Testament. He wrote to Colet, eleven years before the time of his life at which we have now arrived, to the following effect. After having informed him as I have already stated,* that he had been struggling to devote himself to the study of sacred literature, and that he had been prevented by the want of a better knowledge of Greek from continuing his work on St. Paul's Epistles, he continues: “For nearly these three years past, I have given my mind altogether to Greek literature; and I do not think that my labour has been lost.”† He had, by this unremitting application, become the best grammarian and critic of his time. He had long seen, as I have said, that the Vulgate was obscure

* See page 53.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 351, edit. Bas.

and full of inaccuracies ; and therefore it was that he determined to publish the Christian Scriptures in their original tongue, along with a translation of them into Latin from the Greek. He was the first to undertake this work.* He consulted all the manuscripts which he could discover ; he carefully read the works of the Fathers and the Greek Commentators, marking down from them the various readings ; that he might give the Greek text as correctly as possible. The Latin translation is printed side by side with it, with Annotations. We may mention as a remarkable proof of his sagacity and diligence, that he was the first to discover that the words in 1 John v. 7, 8, "In heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth," are not genuine, and that the passage should stand thus : "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood ; and these three agree in one." Erasmus had, however, pledged himself in his controversy with Lee, to insert the words if they existed in one Greek manuscript. A Codex Britannicus, written probably under Lee's direction, was at length found which contained them. Then Erasmus, for the sake of peace, published the words in the third edition. His translations from Greek are wanting in accuracy, because he lived in an age in which there were no dictionaries, and no good editions of the Greek authors. We are quite willing, too, to admit that as we might have expected, the Greek text, having been brought out when the study of Greek had only just commenced in Europe, is very imperfect, and will not stand the test of modern criticism. Still we may venture to affirm that his notes contain many exact philological remarks, founded on a knowledge of the Greek language, of

* The Complutensian Polyglott, by Cardinal Ximenes, was not published till 1522.

the style of the Scriptures, and of the doctrine of the Fathers ; and that though he has been surpassed by many men inferior to him in ability and industry, who lived at a time when critical knowledge was very generally cultivated, yet he must have the merit given to him of having been the pioneer in that work of criticism which has shed a bright light on many parts of the records of heavenly truth.

Erasmus must now explain his own object. The following is a translation of a portion of the "Paraclesis," or "Exhortation to the study of Christian philosophy," which was prefixed to the *Novum Instrumentum*. It is perhaps the most important part of the work.* "First," he says, "I am sorry to be obliged to make a complaint not altogether new, but still too just, and never more so than at the present time, when men are seeking knowledge with so much eagerness,—that this philosophy of Christ is the only one which is ridiculed by some, and neglected by the majority. But in all the other branches of learning which human industry has produced, there is nothing so hidden and abstruse, that the sagacious intellect of man has not fully examined it ; no difficulty so great that hard labour has not overcome it. How then is it that this is the only philosophy which is not studied with equal earnestness, at least, by those who make a profession of Christianity ? Platonists, Pythagoreans, Academics, Stoics, Cynics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, have quite mastered the tenets of their own sects, have them firmly fixed in their memory, are ready to fight for them, nay, to die rather than desert the standard of their leader. Why do not we show much more zeal in the service of Christ, our Leader and King ? Who would not think it very disgraceful for one who professes his belief in the philosophy of Aristotle, to be igno-

* Op. tom.v. p. 116, edit. Bas.

rant of the opinions of that celebrated man on the cause of thunder, or on the origin of matter, subjects, a knowledge or ignorance of which cannot add to our happiness or misery. But we who are in so many ways instructed in the doctrines of Christ, do not account it a disgrace to be ignorant of what will certainly lead us to eternal happiness. But why should I use argument to show their folly, when it is a very plain proof of madness to wish to compare Christ with Zeno and Aristotle; His doctrine with their very unimportant precepts? Let them attach as much importance as they please to the founders of their sects. *Our* Teacher is the only One Who has descended from heaven; He alone, as He is Eternal Wisdom itself, can give us certain knowledge; He alone can instruct us in the things which pertain to our salvation, because He alone is the Author of it; He alone has practised whatever He taught; He alone can fulfil His promises. If any thing is brought to us from the land of the Chaldeans or from Egypt, we have some difficulty in understanding it because it comes from a foreign country; and often we lose our time in an anxious, laborious, and useless endeavour to comprehend the dreams of an insignificant man, not to say an impostor. How then is it that the minds of Christians are not inflamed with a desire for this knowledge, when they know very well that this learning has come not from Egypt or Syria, but from heaven itself? This philosophy is as well-suited to the highest as the lowest. Nay, the farther you advance in it, the more are you elevated by its majesty. It excludes no age, no sex, no condition of life. The sun is not more common to all than the doctrine of Christ. It does not repel any but those who refuse it themselves. For

* He is here plainly referring to those mentioned above, who at this time professed a belief in the ancient heathen philosophy, and scoffed at the Christian faith.

I differ altogether from those who are unwilling that the Scriptures should be translated into the vulgar tongue, and should be read by the unlearned, as if Christ had taught such mysterious doctrine that it could scarcely be understood even by a few theologians, or as if ignorance were the best safeguard of the Christian religion. It is, perhaps, better to conceal the mysteries of kings; but Christ wishes His mysteries to be published as widely as possible. I wish even the most ignorant woman to read the Gospels, and the Epistles of St. Paul. I wish that they were translated into all languages, so that they might be read and understood, not only by the Scotch and Irish, but even by the Turks and the Saracens. I greatly wish that the husbandman should sing some of the verses at his plough-tail, that the weaver should sing them while throwing his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile a tedious journey with the stories contained in them." He thus concludes this treatise:—

"Let us, then, all thirst for this knowledge; let us embrace these books; let us be constantly engaged in the study of them; let us give our minds to them; let us, since all reading should end in practice, be transformed into the spirit of what we read. . . . If any pretend to show us the footprints of Christ, how devoutly we fall down and adore them! Why do we not rather worship His living and breathing image in these books? If any offer to show us Christ's robe, to what part of the world are we not ready to run to kiss it? But if the whole of His wardrobe were exhibited, you would find nothing which represents Christ more clearly and truly than the writings of the Evangelists. From love to Christ we adorn with jewels and gold His image of wood and stone. Why do we not rather decorate with gold and jewels, or even with more valuable ornaments, those books which bring Christ so much more

vividly before us than any image? That, indeed, if it bear any resemblance at all to Him, only expresses His bodily likeness; these exhibit to us the living image of His most holy mind, and bring back to us Christ Himself, speaking, healing, dying, rising again. In a word, they set Christ so plainly before us, that we could not see Him better if we were to see Him with our bodily eyes."

The following extracts from his "*Ratio Veræ Theologiæ*" show us the spirit and manner in which we ought to study the Scriptures. Some of these observations on the right method of theological study were originally added to the first edition of the "*Novum Instrumentum*," or "*Testamentum*," as he afterwards called it. When the second was published, in the beginning of 1519, he enlarged this part of his work. It was also published separately under the title just given.*

"In speaking of the learning which we must possess in order that we may well understand the Scriptures, I have no hesitation in saying that we must master the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages. . . . You must not, my good reader, be deterred from the work by the difficulty of it. If you are determined to learn, if you have a proper teacher, you will learn these three languages with less trouble than men take every day in learning one half-formed language, which is a wretched babble, and which they cannot master, partly from the want of proper instructors, partly from their ignorance. It is impossible for you to understand the Scriptures if you are ignorant of the language in which they are written. Some idioms cannot be so translated into another language, as to convey the same meaning as in the original. Some small words, again, are untranslatable, as St. Jerome constantly complains.† . . . If a man should be gifted with genius, and should be likely to be

* Op. tom. v. p. 63, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., p. 65.

distinguished as a theologian, I think that he should be trained, as Augustine says, with moderation, with caution, and in a manner suitable to his age, in more elegant learning. He should possess a knowledge of dialectics, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, astronomy. He should be acquainted with natural objects, with animals, trees, jewels, especially those connected with the places mentioned in Scripture; for if we understand the geography of these countries, we follow with our minds the course of the history, and with great pleasure to ourselves are carried along, so that we seem to *see* everything, not to *read* of it. Thus, our reading makes a much deeper impression on our minds. If we learn from history, not the situation only, but also the origin, the manners, the customs, the worship, the character of the people to whom the events spoken of occurred, or to whom the Apostles wrote their letters, it is astonishing how much light is shed on what we read, how much vital energy is given to that which before seemed so sluggish and lifeless when the names of everything were unknown to us; when making a bold guess, or consulting very bad dictionaries, we mistook a tree for a quadruped, a jewel for a fish, a harper for a river, a town for a shrub, a star for a bird."*

He afterwards refers to the importance of explaining the Scriptures according to their historical sense. He is here plainly condemning the Schoolmen, who, by drawing away verses from the context, and extracting from them various meanings, had caused the Bible to cease to be a record of real events, or of the lives of individuals. After giving an example from Origen of the manner in which the Scriptures are to be read, he thus proceeds: "These things are explained in a copious and elegant manner by Origen, I do not know whether with greater pleasure or profit to the

* Op. tom. v. pp. 66, 67.

reader. He gives only the historical sense, and applies the same method to the books of Scripture which Donatus applied to the comedies of Terence, when he explained the meaning of the author." . . .*

He then proceeds to speak of the great superiority of the Fathers to these new interpreters of Scripture. "If any one will compare those old theologians, Origen, Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome, with these modern theologians, he will see in them a river of gold, while in the latter he sees only scanty rivulets, not very pure, and not corresponding to the fountain from which they have flowed. In the one he will hear the thunder of the oracles of eternal truth; in the other only the Commentaries of men which, the more closely they are examined, appear to bear the greater resemblance to fugitive dreams. In the one a building rises, resting on the solid foundation of Holy Scripture; in the other a machine is erected, at once empty and vast, which stands on the shallow subtleties and false glosses of mere mortals. In the one you will range as it were over very beautiful gardens, with which you will be greatly delighted and satisfied; in the other you will wander among barren bushes by which your flesh will be torn. In the one everything is full of majesty; in the other nothing is splendid, but, on the contrary, everything is mean, and unworthy of the dignity of theology."†

But though Erasmus greatly valued the Fathers, he did not attach an undue importance to human authority. One of his objects was to undermine the authority of those "irrefragable" doctors, to whose dogmas men were required to yield an unqualified assent. Another was to convince those of their error who, as we have seen, had preferred the philosophy of Zeno and Aristotle to the philosophy of Christ; who had dared to call Christianity a cunningly devised

* Op. tom. v. p. 68.

† Ibid., p. 69.

fable, and eternity a dream. He saw very plainly that this cold scepticism was the reaction from the blind trust which they were required to repose in men such as Julius II. and others, who by their manifest disregard of the precepts of Scripture denied the Lord who bought them and the Saviour who redeemed them at the price of His most precious blood. These men were not consequently in a state of mind in which they were likely to be reclaimed from the error of their ways by a reference to the opinions of men. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that, with both these objects in view, he should be rather inclined to lead men away from human interpretations of the truths of the Bible. Accordingly, he afterwards represents the Fathers "as men, mistaken in some things, ignorant of others. At times," he continues, "they were careless, and even surrendered some points for the sake of vanquishing the heretics with whose disputes the world was then agitated."* His object, in fact, seems to have been rather to lead his readers to drink large draughts from those pure and sparkling fountains of eternal truth which are unfolded in the Scriptures to our astonished and delighted view.

We must now show briefly how, according to his own rule, he made the Scriptures speak for themselves ; how he made Christianity rest rather upon her own internal evidence than upon the authority of the "irrefragable" doctors of the Church. He shows the wonderful agreement between the life and the teaching of Christ. "No lie is so skilfully contrived as to agree in all respects with itself. Now every part of His doctrine agrees with itself and with His life, and is agreeable also to nature. He taught innocence ; He Himself so lived, that not even hired witnesses, after trying in various ways, could find any charge which could with the least probability be brought against Him. He taught gen-

* Op. tom. v. p. 112, edit. Bas.

teness ; and was Himself led as a lamb to the slaughter. He taught poverty, and we read that He never possessed, nor pretended that he possessed, anything. He dissuaded men from ambition and pride, and He washed His disciples' feet. He taught that this was the way to true glory and immortality ; He Himself, by the ignominy of the cross, obtained a name which is above every name ; and while He did not seek an earthly kingdom, gained all power in heaven and earth. You will perhaps find in the books of Plato and Seneca what is not contrary to the teaching of Christ ; you will find in the life of Socrates some things which agree with the life of Christ ; but this wide range, and this universal harmony of things agreeing between themselves, you will find in Christ alone."*

He ends his treatise in the following manner :—"How sad it is to see a divine of eighty years old knowing nothing but mere sophisms ! I would rather be a pious divine with Chrysostom, than invincible with Scotus. I would ask, has one heathen been converted to the Christian faith, or has one heretic been changed by their subtleties ? If anybody wishes to be properly instructed rather in the duties of piety than in the art of disputation, let him at once go to the fountain ; let him be conversant with those writers who have drunk directly from the fountain-head. That theologian will be invincible enough who yields to no vice, no evil desires, even if he should be beaten in an angry disputation. He is a very great "doctor" who purely preaches Christ. If they think it disgraceful not to know what Scotus teaches, it is still more so not to know what Christ teaches. If it is unbecoming in a theologian not to have mastered the opinions of Durandus, it is still

* Op. tom. v. p. 77, edit. Bas. See for similar instances pages 78, 79, 80, 81, and 82.

more so not to have made himself acquainted with those of St. Paul. A theologian has his name from the divine oracles, not from human opinions."*

We gather from the extracts already given, that the great object of Erasmus in publishing his edition of the New Testament, was to bring before the world an accurate record of the life and teaching of Christ. He has given expression to his views and feelings on this subject in the following passage in the same "*Ratio Veræ Theologiæ*:"—"Since the great object of the teaching of Christ is to bring us to lead a holy life, we should examine carefully the Sacred Volume, that we may find in His example a rule for our guidance in all the circumstances of our lives; especially the Gospels, from which a knowledge of our duties is mainly derived. We must observe, therefore, that Christ Himself acted in a different manner towards different people; towards His parents, towards His disciples, towards the proud Pharisees, towards those who asked Him questions to entangle Him in His talk, towards the simple people, towards the afflicted, towards His own countrymen, towards strangers, towards magistrates. We should understand also what reasons He gave to His followers for their treatment of their relations and friends, of the deserving and those who received or rejected the grace of the Gospel, of persecutors, of the Jews, of the Gentiles, of the weak, erring, or incorrigible brother, of impious judges, of the flock committed to their charge, and of many other classes of persons with whom they are likely any day to have intercourse."† He thought that mistranslations, or errors of any kind, were like clouds which obscured the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness. He wished that these should, as far as possible, be removed, in order that all who opened the Sacred Volume for light, holi-

* Op. tom. v. p. 116, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., p. 18.

ness, blessing, and comfort, might be able to rejoice in His life-giving and invigorating beams. He showed, by publishing "St. Jerome" at the same time with his "New Testament," that he valued human interpreters of the records of heavenly truth. He complains most justly, in the address to Warham at the beginning, of the little care which past ages had bestowed in preserving the works of the ancient Christians. "I despise not," he says afterwards, "the simple and well-meaning piety of the vulgar, but I am really surprised at the perverse judgment of the multitude. We kiss the old shoes and dirty handkerchiefs of the Saints, and we neglect their books, which are their more holy and valuable relics. We lock up their shirts and clothes in cabinets adorned with jewels; but as to their writings, with which they took so much pains, we abandon them to mouldiness and vermin."* But still he felt, as I have shown, that after all they were imperfect helps, and that their works must be read with discrimination and judgment. He valued a knowledge of "the history, the origin, the manners, the customs, the worship, the character of the people to whom the events spoken of occurred, or to whom the apostles wrote their letters," chiefly because it enabled him to bring Christ, as He is revealed to us in the New Testament Scriptures, more distinctly and vividly before him. He wished thus to be enabled to approach as near as possible to Christ, that he might catch the reflection of the brightness of His character. Above all, he wished the world around him to be conformed to Christ in the inner man—to drink deep into His Spirit—to be in truth so one with Christ, as to judge by the same standard, and to appreciate at the same value, and to cherish the same feelings towards every object in earth and heaven, every interest both in time and eternity. Thus he hoped

* Jortin's "Life of Erasmus," vol. i. p. 84.

that when those referred to, who had practically discarded Christianity as a rule of life, studied the Saviour's character, a surpassing loveliness would appear investing their own; that they would, like the New Jerusalem, be encircled within and without with a pure and holy light, a glory not of earth; and that they would be surrounded with an atmosphere breathing all the sanctity and sweetness, all the purity and peace, of the heavenly world.

We find that this "New Testament" stirred up more opposition against Erasmus than any work which he had yet written. The Schoolmen opposed it because they held the absolute inspiration of every letter of the Latin Vulgate; and because they absurdly fancied that Erasmus was correcting the Holy Ghost when he published an amended translation of the New Testament from the Greek original. These divines, like many who have gone before and succeeded them, exerted every effort to suppress what they could not confute, judging that if this work were generally read, their own credit would be greatly endangered. Writing to his friend, Boville, at Cambridge, he mentions a report which had reached him that "a decree had been issued at one of the colleges that no one should bring that book within its bounds on horses, in ships, in waggons, or by means of porters.' . . . 'O heaven! O earth!' they say, 'Erasmus is correcting the Gospels.' Whereas, we might much more justly say of themselves, 'O the sacrilegious wretches, they have corrupted the Gospels!' Are they afraid that the young men should be called away from studies which they ought to unlearn? why do they not look into the matter more carefully? Nearly thirty years ago nothing was learnt at Cambridge but the little logical treatise of Alexander, those antiquated lessons from Aristotle, and the questions of Scotus. In the progress of time, useful studies

were introduced ; Mathematics, a new, or rather a renewed, Aristotle, and a knowledge of the Greek language. Many other authors were added, whose names even I cannot remember. What, I ask, is consequently the condition of your University ? It has become so flourishing, that it may vie with the best University of the present age. . . . Are they displeased because they will hereafter read more carefully the Gospels and the writings of the Apostles ; and would they rather have the whole of their time spent on these frivolous subtleties ?” He adds, “ These men ought to be called back to the fountain-head.”*

We find that the monks and Schoolmen throughout Europe very generally opposed the “ *Novum Instrumentum*.” The divines at Louvain exclaimed very bitterly against it. The following short extract from a letter to Ammonius, in which he defends himself against their charges, may be interesting to us now, as learned men are still exposed to the same calumnies : “ There are none,” he says, “ who bark at me more furiously than those who never saw even the outside of my book. Try the experiment on any of them and you shall find that I speak the truth. When you meet with one of these brawlers, let him rave on at my New Testament till he has made himself hoarse and out of breath. Then ask him gently whether he has read it. If he has the impudence to say yes, urge him to produce one passage that deserves to be blamed. You will find that he cannot. Consider now whether this be the behaviour of a Christian, or suitable to the profession of a monk, to blacken before the populace a man’s reputation, which they cannot restore to him, even if they try to do so, and to rail at things of which they confess themselves to be ignorant, never considering the declaration of St. Paul, that slanderers shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Of all the vile ways of defaming a

* Op. tom. iii. p. 80, edit. Bas.

man, none is more villanous than to accuse him of heresy ; and yet to this they have recourse upon the slightest provocation.”*

But this work was, as he informs us, more praised than it was censured. The learned of all countries in Europe united in extolling it. He says to his friend Boville, “ I look to Christ for my chief reward ; but if I cannot obtain the approbation of all, I will console myself with the reflection that wise men almost everywhere are satisfied with the book, and I hope that what pleases the best will soon meet with general approval.”† Colet wrote to him a letter in which he expressed his unbounded admiration of the work ; and Archbishop Warham informed him that “ he had shown it to some of his brother-bishops and to professors of theology, and that with one accord they declared that the work amply repaid him for the trouble which he had bestowed upon it.”‡ The first edition had so rapid a sale that he was very soon busy in revising it, and preparing a second edition. It was published about two years after the first, and was dedicated, like it, to Pope Leo, who was now induced to issue a brief stamping authority upon it. The two together consisted of 3300 folio copies.§ He endeavoured also to correct the numerous errors, some of them typographical, while a few were more serious, which his enemies alleged as their pretext for assailing him. These errors may be excused on account of the haste with which the work was completed. Only five or six months were occupied in the printing and editing of it. When his work was so well received by the wise and good throughout Europe, he felt

* Jortin’s “ Life of Erasmus,” vol. i. p. 140.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 80, edit. Bas.

‡ Ibid., p. 76.

§ The third edition appeared in 1522, the fourth in 1527, and the fifth in 1535, the year before his death. All but the last cost much labour.

that he could laugh to scorn his monkish and scholastic calumniators. These men had exerted every effort to prevent the Bible from being given to the people. They thought that there was not the least occasion for them to examine the Scriptures, and that they ought in matters of religious belief to surrender themselves altogether to the guidance of those whom they considered as the infallible teachers of the Church. But Erasmus, in that noble passage in which he expressed his wish that "the husbandman should sing the verses while following his plough, the weaver while throwing his shuttle, and that the traveller should beguile with them the tedium of his journey," has pronounced a distinct condemnation on the views of these divines, which he has rendered still more emphatic by publishing at the same time the works of Jerome, who endeavoured to give the Bible to the people in their own language. The wishes of Erasmus have now been fully gratified. Other men have opened the treasures of the sacred Scriptures to the astonished and delighted view of multitudes from whom they were locked up in a barbarous, obscure, and inaccurate version in an unknown tongue. But while acknowledging the debt of gratitude which we owe to them, let us never forget to express our obligations to him who, amid difficulties occasioned by an imperfect knowledge of the art of deciphering manuscripts, the want of experience on the part of the printers in the use of the Greek type, the want of money and other causes, which might well have daunted the most determined courage, prepared the way for that Reformation of the Church which they conducted to a successful issue, not only by publishing the works of Jerome and of the other Latin Fathers, thus unfolding to the world the doctrines of the ancient Church, but also, and above all, by being the first to give an improved version of the Greek original of the New Testament, as well as a

better translation into Latin. He thus rescued from the Church of Rome many passages which in the Vulgate favoured her dogmas, and afforded a guide to those who very soon enabled all orders of the community to “read in their own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VIEWS AND CONDUCT OF ERASMUS IN REGARD TO THE REFORMATION, AND THE MANNER IN WHICH HE AIDED ITS PROGRESS.—(A.D. 1517—1519.)

THE career of Erasmus had hitherto been useful and successful. He had, notwithstanding his poverty, his repudiation by his family, his want of books and masters to instruct him, and an incurable malady, become, by his transcendent abilities and indefatigable industry, the greatest scholar, and in some respects the greatest divine, on this side of the Alps. He was equal to, or surpassed, the most distinguished men in Italy. In wit and satire he was absolutely unrivalled. Princes were constantly corresponding with him, and competing for the honour of his residence in their dominions. The Pope and many distinguished prelates united to do him honour. The four or five years ending with 1517, when he was in his fifty-first year, were probably the happiest and most useful of his life. If he had died now, he would have been spared much misery, and he would have occupied a higher place than he does at the present time in the good opinion of his fellow-creatures. He never was, nor ever could have been, as we shall see hereafter, a Lutheran reformer, but he would have been celebrated as having done much to enable others to effect a Reformation,

because he condemned in his writings many of the dogmas of Romanism, because he, more than any one else, promoted the revival of classical learning, because he waged war with the scholastic philosophy and the superstitions of the Church of Rome, which he ridiculed in his works, and because he constantly appealed to Holy Scripture in all his exhortations and instructions.

But I have now to present a melancholy reverse to this picture. We shall see it as we read the history of that great religious revolution which shook to its foundation the usurped dominion of the Roman Pontiff. I need not describe minutely the contest about indulgences. Leo X. wished to replenish his exhausted coffers. Accordingly he determined on the sale of them. He persuaded the princes of Europe to allow the papal collectors to enter his dominions by promising them a share of the spoil. He assigned as his pretexts for this collection a war against the Turks, and the necessity of raising money for the erection of St. Peter's at Rome. Many saw through the hollowness of the first pretext. Erasmus thus expresses himself in a new edition of his "Adages": "I do not like to suspect what has too often been found to be true, that this 'rumour of a war against the Turks is put forward as a pretext for the spoliation of the people of Christendom.'"^{*} And again, writing to Paulus Volzium, an Abbot, he says, "We are making preparations for a war against the Turks. With what view soever this be undertaken, we ought to pray to God that it may be profitable, not to a few, but to all of us in common."[†] We all know the issue of this matter. Luther, full of indignation when he found certain people who came to him for confession deluding themselves with the idea that, after having purchased an indulgence, they might plunge without scruple and without remorse into the practice of every vice,

^{*} "Adages," c. 96S. [†] Op. tom. iii. p. 885, edit. Bas.

and the perpetration of every crime, and when he witnessed the shameless traffic in indulgences carried on by Tetzel and his brother-monks, posted up on the church door at Wittemberg, on the 31st October, 1517, ninety-five propositions against the doctrine of indulgences. This was the commencement of that memorable revolution which shook to its foundation the fabric of Papal domination.

We learn the views of Erasmus on this movement from a remarkable letter written soon after this time to Albert, a younger brother of the Elector Joachim of Brandenburg, who at the age of four-and-twenty had been created Archbishop and Elector of Maintz and Magdeburg, and afterwards a Cardinal.* He was sumptuous, worldly, and dissipated; but he had a clear perception of many of the abuses of Romanism, was in his heart not strongly opposed to Luther, and for a long time prevented the monks from attacking him. "The world" (he says) "is burdened with human ordinances, with scholastic opinions and dogmas, and with the tyranny of Mendicant brothers, who, although they are the satellites of the Roman See, yet have become so numerous and have attained so much power, that they are formidable to kings, and to the Pope himself. When the Pope takes their part, he is more than a God to them; but when he acts contrary to their interest, he is no more to them than a phantom. I do not condemn all, but most of them are such as for gain and power do their best to ensnare the consciences of men. And with brazen front they began, not to preach Christ, but their own novelties, and afterwards more insolent dogmas. They so spoke of indulgences that even fools must despise them. By these and similar means the strength of the gospel, by little and little, decayed; and everything was gradually changing for the worse, so that at length that spark of Christian piety

* Op. tom. iii. p. 402, edit. Bas.

would have been extinguished, from which the flame of Christian love could be rekindled. The substance of religion was inclining towards ceremonies more than Judaical. These evils are lamented by all good men, and by all divines who are not monks; and the existence of them is admitted by some of the monks themselves in private conversation. These are the things which moved the spirit of Luther, and gave him the courage to oppose the intolerable impudence of certain men. I can come to no other conclusion when I know that he seeks neither honour nor gain."

He said in the same letter, "I am neither the accuser of Luther, nor his advocate, nor his judge. I should not venture to form an opinion as to his spirit. That is too difficult a matter for me. But yet why should I be blamed if I favour him as a good man, as his enemies admit him to be; or if I defend him as a man accused, a liberty which the laws allow even to sworn judges; or if, as humanity requires, I defend him from the oppression of those who, under a false pretext of zeal, are zealously attacking polite learning? Why should I not take compassion on him when I do not mix myself up with his cause? In a word, I think that it is the duty of a Christian so to favour Luther, that, if he be innocent, I would not have him trodden down by a wicked faction, and if he be in error, I would rather have him reclaimed than destroyed. This course is much more agreeable to the example of Christ, who, to use the words of the prophet, would not 'break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.'"

We see then that soon after Luther began his career, Erasmus expressed his approbation of his work. In the year 1517 he published a sixth edition of his "Adages," to the proverbs in which, as in previous editions, he added matter expressive of his indignation on account of the disgraceful conduct of the Pope, the ecclesiastics of

the Church of Rome, and of the monarchs of Europe. On his arrival at Basle from Louvain, in May, 1518, he published a new edition of his "Enchiridion," to which he added a preface in the shape of a letter to Paul Volzcius, an Abbot, containing strong observations on the follies and vices of the times.* This letter, which was read all over Europe, increased the indignation of the monks against him.

He alluded to the war against the Turks, and observed that attempts would be made to bring them over to Christianity. He availed himself of this opportunity of again attacking the Schoolmen. "Shall we then put into their hands an Occam, a Durandus, a Scotus, a Gabriel, or an Alvarus? What will they think of us, what will they think, when they hear of our perplexed subtleties concerning Instants, Formalities, Quiddities, and Relations? . . . What, when they behold the Jacobins fighting for their Thomas, and the Minorites for their most refined and seraphic doctors, and the Nominalists and Realists, each defending their own jargon, and attacking that of their adversaries. What must they think when they find it so very difficult to know what expressions may be used when we speak of Jesus Christ; as if you had to do with a morose and angry demon, whom you call forth to your own destruction if you make a mistake in the form of evocation, and not rather with a most merciful Saviour, who requires nothing from us but purity and simplicity of life? . . . Tell me, I beseech you, what effect this will produce when they observe that our lives contradict our creed, and observe our tyranny, our ambition, our avarice, our rapacity, our lust, our debauchery, our cruelty, and our oppressions? The best way of gaining them would be to show that we are the servants and imitators of Jesus Christ; that we covet neither their lands, nor their money, nor their wives, nor their daughters, but that we desire only their salvation, and the

* Op. tom. iii. p. 885, edit. Bas.

glory of Christ. This is the true, pure, and powerful theology which formerly subjected to Jesus Christ the pride of philosophers, and the sceptres of kings."

He then proceeded to attack all the religious orders, but especially the monks. "Those who are called monks are now found in the midst of worldly business, exercising a kind of tyranny over the affairs of men. They alone are holy. . . . Why should we thus narrow the Christian profession, when Christ wished it to be as broad as possible?

"In every path of life, let all strive to attain to the mind of Christ. Let us assist one another, neither envying those who surpass us, nor despising those who may lag behind. And if any one should excel another, let him beware lest he be like the Pharisee in the Gospel, who recounted his good deeds to God; rather let him follow the teaching of Christ, and say, I am an unprofitable servant. No one more truly has faith than he who distrusts himself. No one is really farther from true religion than he who thinks himself most religious."

In compliance with the urgent request of the authorities of the University of Louvain, Erasmus had now made that city his head-quarters for nearly two years, having gone to it in the winter of 1516-17. This University was as celebrated as that of Paris, and contained 3000 students. Soon after his arrival he composed the "Complaint of Peace." She harangues the public, enumerates the blessings she never fails to confer on mankind as long as she is honoured and respected by them, but complains that all classes of men had ceased to regard her. This treatise became very popular in Europe. On his arrival at Louvain from Basle, in the autumn of 1518, Erasmus had been attacked by a serious illness. A report of his death was brought to Cologne by a preaching brother, to a party of monks at a convivial meeting. They immediately ex-

pressed their joy when the preacher told them in monkish Latin that he had died *sine lux, sine crux, sine Deus*.

This severe illness was, in a measure, owing to hard study, and to the necessity of constant journeys from place to place. If he would write much on any subject, especially if he would bring out editions of classical authors, he must travel to every place in Europe where he could obtain access to books and manuscripts. He must not only undergo the fatigue of travel, but also suffer from the privations and the treatment of which he has given so graphic a description in his account of the German inns. After the labour of bringing out his edition of the New Testament, which, he said, destroyed his health, he had indeed declared that he was sick of a troublesome world, and had expressed his determination of giving up his studies, or at least of no more appearing as an author. But we find that he never carried that determination into effect. In fact, after that time, the number of his works rather increased than diminished. As we have seen in the case of the "Praise of Folly," he would never allow his mind to rest from work even during his travels. New editions of his works were, as we shall see presently, constantly issuing from the press of Froben at Basle, and of Martins at Louvain, two of the very few intelligent men who could be trusted to print and correct works in the ancient languages. The immediate cause of this illness was hard work in Froben's office for several months on his "Paraphrase," or, exposition of the meaning of seven of the Epistles. He had published that on the "Epistle to the Romans" at Louvain in 1517. In compliance with Colet's wish he was also preparing at this time "Paraphrases on the Gospels." This work was projected by him as long ago as 1516, immediately after he had finished his "New Testament," to which he designed it to be a companion. It seemed as if the report of his death brought

to the monks were only premature, and that Erasmus would have been carried off at this time before he had completed it. But they had no occasion for their rapturous applause. He recovered, and published the work on the Epistles just referred to in the spring of 1519, and a Paraphrase on the remainder of the Epistles, and on the Gospels subsequently. As the "Paraphrases on the Gospels and Epistles" is a very important work, I shall now make a few observations upon it.

It was highly valued in the age in which he lived. It seems to have escaped censure. The best critics of former days have expressed a high opinion of its merits. "Never did Papist, Lutheran, or Calvinist," said Scaliger, "compose a better or more elegant work than the 'Paraphrase of Erasmus.'" Of course, great advances have been made in the critical knowledge of Holy Scripture since the time of its publication. But still we may say that we owe a debt of gratitude to him, inasmuch as he removed the rubbish which had been for ages accumulating over the sacred volume, and called attention to the simple and historical interpretation of the Bible. The "Paraphrases" should never be separated from the "Annotations on the New Testament." In the latter his business was to explain words, and he does not always show fully the connection of the passage with the context, nor bring forward the arguments which have led the sacred writer to his conclusions. He has supplied these deficiencies to the fullest extent in his "Paraphrases." He has not expressed the meaning of the Sacred Writers in the words which they would have used if they had written in the Latin language, but he has endeavoured to discuss their doctrine, and has introduced as many words and ideas into his "Paraphrase" as he deemed to be necessary to fix it in the minds of his readers. His great object was to explain the New Testament by itself.

As he was well acquainted with the writings of the Fathers, he has given with great perspicuity the sense of Christian antiquity as to the meaning of particular passages. This work was, at the time of the Reformation in England, so highly esteemed by Cranmer, that he caused it to be translated into English, to be authorized by the king, and to be placed, along with the Bible, in our churches for public use. Every parish was enjoined to buy a copy. A charge of £20,000 was thus laid on the realm. Mutilated and moth-eaten copies may still occasionally be seen chained to their desks. I have given Bishop Stillingfleet's observations on it in my introductory chapter. Strype informs us that the "Paraphrase on the Four Gospels" was translated and published in English at the charge and direction of the amiable and learned Queen Catherine Parr, who employed Nicholas Udal, master of Eton School, and others in that work, and is supposed to have done part of it herself.* It was published in 1547. The whole work was finished in 1549 and 1552. Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, was opposed to the public use of it; but Cranmer asserted that, though not free from errors, it was the best work of the kind; that it was written by "the most indifferent writer;"† by which words he meant by one who was quite impartial, who was strongly opposed to scholastic theology, and was well acquainted with the works of the Fathers. This is one of those publications by which he showed that, in building up the faith of this country, he was influenced more by a spirit of comprehension than of exclusion. "Having been executed by a member of the Church of Rome, from whose eyes, however," as Professor Blunt observes in his "History of the Reformation,"‡ "the scales were fast falling, it was

* Strype's Memor., vol. ii. p. 28.

† Burnet's Hist. of Reform., ii. 37, fol.

‡ Page 203.

calculated, he might think (and an expression which drops from him confirms this), for a Church in a state of transition like our own. Had Gardiner compared it," he continues, "with similar writings of some other of the Reformers, he would have found that, in making such a choice, Cranmer, so far from intending to irritate, could only be led by a desire to conciliate the Roman Catholics as much as might be without a compromise. Had he compared, for instance, Erasmus's 'Paraphrase of the Galatians' with the Commentary of Luther on the same Epistle; had he contrasted the caution of the one interpreter with the intrepidity, not to say hardihood, of the other, the different degrees of animation with which the great evangelical doctrines, and those the most obnoxious to the Roman Catholics, are respectively handled by them; the different degrees of keenness they discover in the detection of those doctrines under the same texts; the more or less reserved sense in which the works of the law are understood as affecting justification; not to speak of the direct fulminations against the Church of Rome, which Luther takes every occasion to launch, and Erasmus to withhold; if he had thus done, probably Luther's most powerful treatise would not, indeed, have made him a convert to his opinions; Cranmer himself most likely would have disavowed, or at least tempered, several of them; but it would have, at any rate, satisfied him that the Archbishop had far more offensive weapons in his armoury than those which he thought proper on this occasion to produce."

Luther, since the publication of the theses on indulgences, had been preserved from the indignation of the Pope. He would only have rushed on certain destruction, if God had not disposed the heart of Frederic, the Elector of Saxony, to befriend him. Having been summoned to appear before the Pope's legate at Augsburg, he had vanquished him in

argument. The result was that Rome was about to hurl her spiritual thunderbolts at the intrepid champion of the Reformation. Frederic, intimidated by her menaces, gave Luther an intimation that he must prepare to withdraw from his dominions. The spiritual fate of Germany, indeed of Europe itself, seemed to be at this time trembling in the balance. But the Reformer was not obliged to bend before the storm. The thunderbolt was poised ; but it was not hurled. The Prince of the kings of the earth smote down with his sceptre the hand which had just drawn it from the Papal arsenal. The Pope, who had just been breathing forth threatenings against him, seems suddenly to have changed them for the winning accents of conciliation. It may be that he fancied that he would never have opposed him, if he had not received an assurance that Frederic would make common cause with him, and would declare as his enemies those who endeavoured to compass his destruction. The result was that Luther was not banished from the land of his fathers, and that he was enabled to carry forward towards completion the enterprise in which he was engaged.

It was during the pause which followed these proceedings that Erasmus and Luther wrote to each other. In March, 1519, Luther sent a very courteous letter to Erasmus. He fancied that the latter must be altogether on his side, because he had declared himself against the superstitious religion of the monks, and because these men equally detested both of them. He spoke of Erasmus as reigning in the hearts of all who loved literature. It seemed to him that he could discover the taste and temper of Erasmus from his new Preface to his "Enchiridion."*

To this letter Erasmus sent a reply in the following May. He had already, as we have seen, expressed his approbation of the Lutheran movement. At the beginning he called Luther

* Op. tom. iii. p. 243, edit. Bas.

his dearest brother in Christ, and informed him that he had not read his works, and therefore could neither approve nor disapprove of them ; but that it would be much better for his adversaries to publish grave and solemn arguments against them, than to find fault with them before the multitude, especially as the moral character of the author was irreproachable. He had, however, looked into part of his "Commentaries on the Psalms," was much pleased with them, and hoped that they might prove very useful. Many persons in England and at Louvain, he added, commended his writings. We find afterwards an exhortation to moderation, and a recommendation to attack not the persons of Popes and Kings, but abuses of their authority, and those evil counsellors who had imposed upon them.*

A little time afterwards Erasmus wrote to Cardinal Wolsey. He complained in this letter very heavily of some persons who tried to prevent him from carrying into effect his design of applying human learning to sacred purposes, and of translating and illustrating the Scriptures. "As to Luther," he continued, "he is altogether unknown to me, and I have read nothing of his except two or three pages—not because I dislike him, but because my own studies and occupations do not give me leisure to do so. But yet, as I hear, some persons say that I have assisted him. If he has written well, the praise must not be given to me, and if he has written ill, I ought not to be blamed, since, in all his writings, there is not a line which came from me. His life is universally commended ; and it is an argument in his favour, that his character is unblamable. I was once against Luther, because I was afraid that he would bring an odium upon literature, which is already too much suspected of evil ; for I know full well how invidious it is to oppose

* Op. tom. iii. p. 244.

those opinions which bring so plentiful a harvest of gain to the priests and monks.”*

Erasmus wrote a remarkable letter at this time, which may serve to show his views on the great question of the Reformation of the Church. Joannes Slechta, a Bohemian, had written a long letter to Erasmus, in which he gave him an account of three religious parties in Bohemia. First, he spoke of the Papal party, among whom were most of the magistrates and nobility: the second, he said, administered the Sacrament in both kinds to the laity, and performed divine service in the vulgar tongue; the third was the sect of the Pyghards, who abhorred the priests and monks, regarded the Pope and clergy as Antichrist, thought little of the authority of Fathers and Schoolmen, saw only simple bread and wine, no divinity, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; rejected auricular confession, penance, extreme unction, and other doctrines of Romanism.†

Erasmus replied by condemning the Pyghards on some points, and commending them on others. He blamed Slechta also for his harsh feelings towards them. He thus continued: “Many might be reconciled to the Church of Rome, if we did not define everything exactly, and were contented with those doctrines which are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, and are necessary to salvation. These are few in number; and it is easier to persuade men to accept few than many. Now, out of one article we make a hundred, some of which are such that men might be ignorant of them or doubt them without any injury to religion. But such is the nature of men, that they will obstinately maintain what has once been defined. The sum of the philosophy of Christ lies in this—that we should know that all our trust is to be placed in God, who freely gives us all things

* Op. tom. iii. p. 371, edit. Bas.

† Ibid., p. 462.

by His Son Jesus Christ; that we are redeemed by the death of the Son of God, that being dead to the desires of the world, we may live conformably to His precepts and example, not only doing evil to no one, but doing good to all; that, when adversity befalls us, we should patiently submit to it, in hopes of the reward which is reserved for all good men at the coming of Christ; that we should make a daily progress in virtue, ascribing nothing to ourselves, but everything to God. Such are the convictions with which man ought to be penetrated, until this has become in him a second nature. If any wish to inquire into abstruse points concerning the divine nature, the person of Jesus Christ, or the Sacraments, in order that they may improve their understandings, and raise their minds and affections above earthly things, let them be permitted to do so, provided their Christian brethren be not compelled to believe everything which different teachers think to be true. As instruments expressed in a multitude of words lead to law suits, so, in religion, many determinations, decrees, and decisions, lead to endless controversies.”*

From this letter it appears that Erasmus was very latitudinarian in his views. He would have a very comprehensive Church. He would admit to it the Pyghards, as well as their opponents. Herein he differed altogether from Luther. The latter has called the doctrine of justification by faith, the article of a standing or a falling Church. Luther, when he began to read the “*Novum Instrumentum*,” found that on matters connected with this doctrine, the system of Erasmus and his own were directly opposed to each other. Erasmus, however, did not perceive at first the fundamental difference between himself and Luther, or he would not have written the letters commending his work, extracts from which have been recently given.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 465, edit. Bas.

Luther had a very decided opinion on the doctrine of original sin. He held that we must feel deeply our disease before we can apply for a remedy. Conviction of sin is one of the most striking features in his system. He thus wrote in his first Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians: "Be it that I have not committed, *in act*, homicide, adultery, theft, and other sins of such a kind, against the second table of God's commands; yet I have committed them in heart. Wherefore I am a transgressor of all the commandments of God, and so great is the multitude of my sins, that an ox-hide could not encompass them. Nay, they are not to be numbered; I have sinned more times than the sea has sands." And again he wrote: "Do not imagine your sins small, such as your own works can do away. Do not despair at their number, when you truly feel them in life, or in the hour of death; but believe that Christ, for no feigned and pretended, but for real sins; for sins not small, but the very greatest; not for one or two sins, but for all sins; not for subdued sins (for no man, no angel, can subdue the very least sin), but for sins unsubdued, was delivered to death."

We may easily imagine that, holding these views on the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," he would be deeply grieved when, as, in the course of his reading, he comes to the "Annotations" on chapter v. of the Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle speaks of death "having reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," he finds Erasmus remarking that he does not think it needful here to resort to the doctrine of "original sin," however true in itself, and hinting at the possibility of "hating Pelagius more than enough," and of making use of the doctrine of "original sin" too freely as a means of extricating ourselves from theological difficulties, as astrologers had invented a system of epicycles to get them out of their astronomical dilemmas.

The further he reads, the less he likes Erasmus' system. He thus expresses himself concerning him in a letter to his friend Spalatin : " What pains me in Erasmus, that most learned man, my dear Spalatin, is, that by the righteousness of works or of the law, of which the Apostle speaks, he understands the fulfilling of the ceremonial law. Now, the righteousness of the law consists not only in ceremonies, but in all the works of the Decalogue. When these works are done without faith in Christ, they may, it is true, make men such as Fabricius, Regulus, and others, of perfect integrity in the eyes of men ; but in that case they deserve as little to be called *righteousness*, as the fruit of a medlar to be called a fig. For we do not become righteous, as Aristotle pretends, by doing works of righteousness ; but having become righteous, we do such works. The man must first be changed, and then the works. Abel was first righteous before God, and then his sacrifice." Luther continues : " I beg of you herein to do the part of a friend and a Christian, by pointing out these things to Erasmus."* This letter shows very plainly his anxiety that he should receive into his heart these great truths, in order that he might employ his wonderful genius, and exert his amazing influence in the propagation of them throughout the Continent of Europe.

Luther continued his study of the Novum "Instrumentum," and we find him writing again from Wittenberg, that every day, as he reads, he loses his liking for Erasmus. " I love to see him," he says, " reprove, with so much learning and firmness, the priests and monks for their ignorance ; but I fear that he does small service to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. He has more at heart what depends on man than what depends on God. A man is not a good Christian because he understands Greek and Hebrew. The judgment

* D'Aubigné's " Hist. of the Reformation," vol. i. p. 193, Scott's translation.

of a man who attributes *anything* to the human will is one thing ; the judgment of him who recognizes *nothing but grace* is another thing. Nevertheless, I carefully keep this opinion to myself, lest I should strengthen the cause of his opponents. I trust that the Lord will give him understanding in His own good time.”*

Luther undoubtedly felt strongly on these subjects. He had, some years before, determined to bury himself amid the gloom of cloistered seclusion, that he might, by penances and mortifications, obtain that holiness which was the object of his desire. But his corruptions seemed to him to gather fresh strength with every effort which he exerted to subdue them. He was invited to satisfy the divine justice by his good works. But he found, as he tells us, that they were so defective and so polluted, that he could not, in this way, obtain the blessings of pardon and justification. He never knew when the tale of bricks was complete. He never could be satisfied that he had done enough to secure the approbation of his Maker. Then Staupitz, the vicar-general of the Augustinians, directed him, as we read in his history, to the only true source of peace and consolation. He told him that, when he was clad in the robe of Christ's most perfect righteousness, he would endure, unabashed, the searching gaze of a God of infinite purity. And then he exclaimed : “When I knew this doctrine, the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the gates of Paradise, before closed, burst open to my view.”

Thus Luther was led to consider the question between himself and Erasmus as one of the greatest importance. The law spoken of in the Scripture was the ceremonial law only, or the moral law also. But Luther has shown that both are referred to. If we maintain, with Erasmus, that ceremonial acts are the only ones by which we cannot be

* Luther, Epp. i. p. 52.

justified, we are entangled again in that yoke of bondage from which, as we have just seen, Luther, having been emancipated himself, laboured to emancipate the nations of Europe. In fact, an error on this point constitutes the foundation of the Roman Catholic system. A man holding the views of Erasmus may remain contentedly a member of that Church, which afterwards decreed at Trent: "If any man shall say that men are justified by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or that the grace by which we are justified is the favour of God alone—in other words, that it is not something in ourselves, and meriting justification—let him be anathema or accursed." But a man holding the views of Luther cannot remain a member of a Church which denies this doctrine. His language will be the same which Luther addressed to a friend: "Learn to despair of thyself, and to say to Christ, 'Thou, Lord Jesus, thou art my righteousness, and I, I am thy sin. Thou hast taken what was mine, and thou hast given me what is Thine.' Thou, my dear brother, shalt find peace only in him, by despairing of thyself and thy works, and by learning with what love He opens His arms to receive thee, taking thy sins upon Him, and giving thee all His righteousness."

These two great men were not only on points of doctrine, but also in regard to the mode of reforming the Church, to some extent, antagonistic to each other. Luther was always ready to bare his bosom to the strife, and to rush into the heat and sorest part of the battle. He never hesitated nor faltered in his onward career. Erasmus, on the contrary, could not oppose all the dogmas of Romanism. He did not recognize that in this war there could be no neutrality. He joined Luther in condemning the luxury of the successors of the Apostles; he opposed auricular confession, the trust in the Virgin, the invocation of the Saints, the worship of relics, and other doctrines of the Church of Rome; but he could

not accept, as we have just seen, the distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation, asserting that faith in Christ meant "to aim at virtue only ;" to imitate those graces which shone forth in His all perfect character, and proclaimed the indwelling of the Godhead. Hence it was that he often commended Luther, and exhorted his opponents to refute him by fair argument ; and that he often urged the Reformer himself to be moderate, and recommended him to adopt a less uncompromising tone in his opposition to the dominant Church. He laboured by every means to promote the peace of Christendom. Thus, in the letter to Cardinal Campegius, prefixed to his "Paraphrase on the Epistle to the Ephesians," he recommended Pope Leo to order the parties to deliver their confession of faith without attacking, insulting, or reviling that of others.* If they could not agree, they were to dispute with candour and mildness. If they differed on important points, they should select able and disinterested men who were to discuss them with great moderation. Erasmus, however, forgot that there were very few who were not avowed partizans on one side or the other ; that fewer still had the learning which qualified them to discuss the matters which would be brought before them ; and that the probability was that even if they could come to a decision, it would not be accepted by the large proportion of the inhabitants of Europe.

The truth was, that the schemes of Erasmus were not at all calculated to accomplish the object designed by them. He hoped that the human race, refined by polite learning, and enlightened by the diffusion of Scriptural knowledge, would shake off the superstitions of the middle ages, would adopt a religion drawn directly from the records of heavenly truth, and would pursue their onward career of moral and

* Op. tom vii. p. 697, edit. Bas.

spiritual improvement. Herein Luther would, to a certain extent, agree with him. These two eminent men exerted a vigorous, a sustained, a persevering effort to disperse the darkness then brooding over the nations. But Luther was not so deficient in common sense as to suppose, like Erasmus, that mild exhortations would induce the rulers of the Church to reform abuses from which they derived benefit ; that they would willingly resign the pomp and luxury with which they were surrounded, the gay cavalcade, the table piled with costly viands, the jewelled mitre, and the gorgeous robe ; that anything short of a terrible convulsion would tear up the towers, or dismantle the bulwarks of that structure of ecclesiastical power which had been continually growing up, and had been consolidated by the addition of fresh materials and strong buttresses through successive generations. Mild measures had been employed for ages ; and all of them had failed of the wished-for success. The Mendicants had attempted to reform the Church ; but, by their covetousness, their arrogance, and their disputes, they had increased the evil which they were established to remedy. The poets had attempted in vain to arrest the progress of that moral leprosy which was infecting all orders of human society. Council after council had laboured unsuccessfully for the accomplishment of the same object. The moral pollution of Christendom had, notwithstanding those efforts, become continually greater, until at length men stood aghast at the revolting features which it exhibited. Erasmus, however, was not convinced that a reformation could not be effected in the manner above referred to. He persevered in his exhortations and remonstrances. When, however, he found that all this well-meant advice proved of no avail, then he thought that it would be better to wait to some future time when the reformation might be effected without those civil and religious convulsions which

might, as he feared, shatter the framework of the Church into fragments, and might even be the means of dissolving society into its original elements. But that day could never be expected to arrive. A desperate disease required a strong remedy. A change so great as the one now before us could not be accomplished without terrible commotions. If we wait till we can prevent evil from mingling with the good, we shall have to abandon many of those high and holy enterprises which have for their object the amelioration of human society. The elements of strife in the bosom of Christendom were labouring for a vent, and must have found it ere long. As well might the men of those days have saved Europe from that outburst, as they could have prevented that stream of molten lava from issuing from the summit of the mountain, which changes the garden of roses at its foot into a bleak and desolate waste, possessing scarcely one spot of verdure. If the Reformation had been postponed according to the wishes of Erasmus, the consequence would have been that the common herd of the people, unrestrained by that piety which it promoted even among the poorest and the vilest, would have rushed forth with uncontrollable fury, and would have spread ruin and desolation around them. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who laboured to prevent that fearful catastrophe; who, instead of shrinking appalled from the dangers and difficulties which they were sure to encounter, endeavoured to contend with and destroy those evils which followed in the train of the Reformation, when she went forth on her errand of mercy to the nations of the earth.

We have seen some of the points of difference between Erasmus and Luther. He differed from him also in another respect. He had not his moral courage. Though a thousand hostile forms thronged the path he was pursuing,

Luther was still prepared to march forward. Erasmus, however, trembled and drew back when he surveyed the whole length and breadth of the danger to which he would have been exposed if he had made common cause with him. He had a religious horror of war. He would rather, we are much grieved to say, surrender some portion of the truth than disturb the peace of Christendom. In a letter to his friend Pace, Dean of St. Paul's, when speaking of Luther, he says, "If he had written everything in the most unexceptionable manner, I had no inclination to die for the sake of truth. Every man has not the courage requisite to make a martyr; and, I am afraid, that if I were put to the trial I should imitate St. Peter."* We must not indeed suppose that Erasmus acted against his conscience in this unwillingness to come forward, and lead the assault on the confederated legions of Rome. On the contrary, he felt that this was a work to which, on account of his age, his infirm constitution, and his peculiar temperament, he was altogether unequal. For another reason he was quite disqualified from being a leader in the work of emancipation. He greatly disliked all the modern languages, and would not take the trouble to gain a sufficient knowledge of them to enable him to hold a conversation in them. He has often expressed a wish that every language were proscribed excepting the Latin and Greek. But the Reformation, as an eminent writer observes, was to be an emancipation wrought among people not of Latin, but of Teutonic descent, through the medium of the vernacular language.† He was unwilling, too, to separate from his friends, Warham, More, Mountjoy, Fisher, and others, whose names were hallowed by a thousand tender recollections. We cannot indeed suppose that the probable loss of his pensions, and the fear of coming to want, would have had the effect of preventing him

* Jortin's "Life," vol. i. p. 273.

† Milman's *Essays*, p. 128.

from openly placing himself under the banner of the Reformers; but still I am afraid that the prospect of losing the favour of Henry VIII., Charles V., and the Popes, might have had a considerable influence in determining his conduct, for he often, as we shall see hereafter, showed a childish vanity when he spoke of the numerous letters which he had received from them, and of the many gifts and tokens of their high appreciation of his mental endowments and profound erudition which they had conferred upon him. Perhaps these considerations would have had less influence with him, if he could have understood that this was a death-struggle on the issue of which was to depend the emancipation of the nations of Europe from their spiritual and temporal bondage. Perhaps, too, he would have shown more decision if he had been free from the prejudices of education. He had very confused notions about the authority of the Roman Catholic Church as an arbiter of controversies. He talks much about implicit submission to her judgment in matters of faith. We must remember that Luther was under the influence of the same prejudices. "I entered on this affair," he said, "with great fear and trembling. Who was I at that time—I a poor wretched despicable friar, more like to a dead body than a man—who was I to oppose the majesty of the Pope, in whose presence not only the kings of the earth and the entire world, but further, if I may so speak, heaven and earth trembled, and were constrained to obey his nod?"* Since then a man, in the prime of life, of an iron constitution, of great personal courage, and of an indomitable will, found it very difficult to cast off his superstitious reverence for the Pope, and enter on a deadly struggle with that giant who had so long lorded it over God's heritage,—a man too who had not the same connection as Erasmus with the Pope, the bigoted

* D'Aubigné's "History of the Reformation," vol. i. p. 129.

sovereigns of Europe, and the dignitaries of the Church of Rome,—we can easily imagine that the latter would experience great difficulty in making a change if we remember that he had come to an age when men cannot, without a very strong effort, divest themselves of cherished prejudices and prepossessions, that disease incapacitated him for that effort, or for vigorous action of any description, and that he had now arrived at a time of life when a mind, the whole force of which had been given in youth and in manhood to the investigation of truth, longed ardently for repose, and was naturally unwilling to give itself to the solution of perplexing and difficult questions. He could not decide for either party, for he thought that both had some errors. We shall have occasion to mention presently causes of his alienation from the Reformers. We could have wished, indeed, that the case had been otherwise, not only on account of his peace of mind, as we shall see hereafter, but also on account of the vast influence, which, if he had been more decided, he would have exercised on the progress of this great religious revolution. But while we condemn him for his failings, let us never forget the debt of gratitude which we owe to him ; that he spent a long and laborious life in opposing barbarous ignorance, blind superstition, and many of the errors of the Church of Rome ; and, let us admit, that he deserves to be called the most illustrious of the Reformers before the Reformation.

About the time when Luther commenced his career, the opposition of the ecclesiastics to Erasmus began. At all times and in all places, but especially from the pulpits, were now heard fierce invectives against him. Up to the year 1520, he enjoyed the esteem and confidence of the leading men of both parties. Those who assailed him were men of an inferior class, monks and friars. He refers to this oppo-

sition in a letter to his friend, Cardinal Campegius.* He says that if he censured them, he meant only the vicious part of them, and had taken no greater liberties than Jerome had taken before him, who was himself a monk. He did not, however, remember that the number of those to whom his censures were applicable was very great indeed; and that whole orders were remarkable for their disregard of every social and relative obligation. We cannot wonder that they should have been so much incensed against him, when we remember that in his "Praise of Folly," and his "Enchiridion," as we have seen, and more recently still, as I have stated, in a new preface to the latter, he had censured their formality, their gross ignorance, and their obstinate attachment to the barbarous scholastic philosophy.

The monks brought the most absurd charges against him and the Lutherans. Writing to the Archbishop of Maintz, he says, "He was formerly reckoned a heretic who differed from the Gospels, from the articles of faith, or from what had equal authority with them. Now any man who differs from Thomas is called a heretic. What does not please them, what they do not understand, is heresy. To know Greek is heresy; to show refinement in conversation is heresy; whatever they do not do themselves is heresy."† He also states in his letter to Campegius, already referred to, that the monks, headed by some Dominicans and Carmelites, stirred heaven and earth to ruin the professors of literature, whom they railed against in their sermons as detestable heretics, doubtless because they imagined that they had promoted the progress of the Reformation. In a letter to Franciscus Chiregatus he complains of the malice of the monks who, in their theological lectures, and in their sermons, affected to couple him with Luther. He says that a

* Op. tom. iii. p. 444, edit. Bas. † Ibid. p. 403, edit. Bas.

certain monk, a coadjutor to the Bishop of Tournay, had declaimed at Bruges against Luther and him; and that, being asked by a magistrate what heresies there were in the books of Erasmus, replied, "I have not read them; once I attempted to read his *"Paraphrases,"* but I found the Latinity too exalted. I am afraid that he may have fallen into some heresy on account of his exalted Latinity.*"

The following amusing story in a letter from Bilibald Pirckheimer to Erasmus may serve to show the ignorance and prejudices of the monks. A Mendicant monk, being in a company where Erasmus was highly commended, did not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction by his look and manner. On being urged to declare what fault he had to find with him, he said that he was a notorious eater of fowls; and that he knew it to be the case, not only because he had seen it himself, but because others had told him of it. "Did Erasmus buy them or steal them?" asked Pirckheimer. "He bought them," replied the monk. "Why, then," said Pirckheimer, "there is a certain fox, which is a greater knave; for he often comes into my yard and takes away a fowl without paying me. But is it then a sin to eat fowls?" "Most certainly," said the monk; "it is the sin of gluttony, and it becomes the more heinous when it is committed by Churchmen." "Perhaps," said Pirckheimer, "he eats them on fast-days." "No," replied the monk; "but we, who are ecclesiastics, ought to have nothing to do with delicacies of this description." "Ah! my good father, you have not got that large paunch by eating dry bread; and if all the fowls which now fill it could raise their voice, and cackle all together, they would make noise enough to drown the drums and trumpets of an army!" †

The following story of a certain Dr. Standish, afterwards Bishop of St. Asaph, may be given to show the ignorant op-

* Op. tom. iii. p. 458, edit. Bas. † Ibid. p. 549, edit. Lugd.

position of the ecclesiastics to Erasmus. He was preaching at St. Paul's Cross on the subject of Christian charity ; but he very soon ceased to allude to it, and made a violent attack upon Erasmus, and his translation of the New Testament into Latin. He said that it was intolerable that Erasmus should dare to corrupt the Gospel of St. John ; for when the Church had for so many years read, "*In principio erat verbum*," he had brought in a new reading, "*In principio erat sermo*." "He added" wrote Erasmus, "that Augustine liked the word '*verbum*' better than '*ratio*,' and gave his reasons for it. But this Grecian, Erasmus, does not understand those reasons. After he had continued for some time in this strain, he tried his eloquence in moving the affections of the people ; he deplored his condition that where he had for so many years read, '*In principio erat verbum*,' he must now be compelled to read '*In principio erat sermo*,' hoping, by this lamentable complaint, to move the people to tears. Then, with loud protestations, he called upon the Mayor of the city of London, the aldermen, and all the common people to give their assistance, for the Christian religion was in the greatest danger. He thought that he spoke as if he were inspired, and yet he pleased nobody ; for those who were only moderately learned wondered at his folly ; those who had any sense laughed at trifles which had no connection with his subject ; and those who were of a more serious character were greatly offended, because he filled the ears of the people, who expected to hear something very different, with babbling of this description."

Standish dined the same day at Court, and two learned friends of Erasmus seated themselves on purpose at the same table with him. They asked him whether he had read the translation of Erasmus. His answer was that he had read as much as he had any inclination to read. They proved that he had altogether mistaken the sense of the

passage in Augustine ; and told him that he had acted very badly in having attacked in public, for a passage in his writings, a man who had otherwise deserved well, when he had neither read nor understood the matter. After having brought him to confess that what he had preached was from pure zeal, and having proved to him by one instance, to the great amusement of the party, that he was very ignorant, and that his zeal was without knowledge, Standish became very angry, and said to one of them, "You had better then go up into the pulpit and preach against me." "No," he said, "I am not so foolish as to preach these things to tradesmen and old women. If I were to preach at Paul's Cross to-day, I should publicly declare what you have said to be false and heretical." Standish, when he heard this, became still more angry, and when the same person went on to say, "You find fault with the translation of Erasmus, and say that it contains heresy, when the Pope has confirmed it by two Bulls," he was quite confounded, but he showed neither shame nor repentance.*

The following is another story of Standish after he had become Bishop, and of his zeal against Erasmus. One day at Court, he broke through the crowd, and fell down on his knees before the King and Queen. Those who were present expected something extraordinary from a venerable man, who enjoyed a high reputation as a divine. He began in English, being well acquainted with his mother-tongue, highly to applaud their Majesties' ancestors for their religious zeal ; he then exhorted them to tread in their footsteps ; and afterwards, with eyes and hands uplifted to heaven, called on them to suppress the heretical books of Erasmus, and to save the Church from the danger with which she was threatened. The same two persons who had argued with him on the former occasion happened to be

* Eras. Hermannio Bincio. Op. tom. iii. p. 484, edit. Bas.

standing near the King, one of whom said to him: "Pray, my lord, since you would instil these prejudices into the minds of princes, be kind enough to show what passages there are in the works of Erasmus from which the Church is to expect deadly heresies and dangerous schisms?" The Bishop promised to do so, and stated, amongst other charges against Erasmus, that he had taken away the article of the resurrection; "for Paul," he said, "in his Epistle to the Colossians," which he mistook for the first to the Corinthians, writes thus: "*Omnes quidem resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur*;" but Erasmus, in the Greek, reads it thus: "*Omnes quidem non dormiemus, sed omnes immutabimur*." One of the friends of Erasmus, having shown him that this reading did not affect the doctrine of the resurrection, and was the true reading of the ancient Fathers, and particularly St. Jerome, the Bishop admitted that this was the case, but that he had it from the Hebrew; and repeated this error until it was manifest to all that he thought that St. Paul had written that Epistle in Hebrew. Then the King, in order to prevent the complete discomfiture of the Bishop, changed the subject of conversation.*

But the most violent of the English opponents of Erasmus was Edward Lee, afterwards Archbishop of York. His patience was so tried by his slanders and opposition, that he said he wished that Lee were not an Englishman, since he was a disgrace to his country. He valued himself on his patience, but it appears that he often lost it in his arguments with Lee. More chastised the "ignorant and obscure monk," for his presumption in opposing the great scholar and divine.† Erasmus was greatly exasperated at his treatment by a man who, though he held no public office by which he was required to attack him, and had not the

* Eras. Hermanno Buschio, Op. tom. iii. p. 485, edit. Bas.

† Jortin's Life, Appendix, vol. ii. p. 689.

learning which qualified him to do so, yet often, disregarding the earnest entreaties of his friends, directed his envenomed shafts against his character, and did not mind what he suffered, provided he could accomplish his ruin.* The epitaph on his tomb in York Cathedral, in which he is described as a learned, good, and generous man, gives an incorrect idea of one whose conduct was, in many respects, highly blamable, and who showed in his intercourse with Erasmus, his ignorance and his want of that grace of charity which communicates to the human character its truest beauty, and stamps upon it its highest excellence.

The charges brought against Erasmus were, as we have seen, absurd and frivolous. He felt, however, at times, very much indeed the attacks thus made upon him. Writing to one of his friends, he says: "I am not anxious to live forever in the memory of my fellow-creatures, but still a good man ought not to neglect his reputation. The judgments of men, however, are various. How turbulent is the present age! How many dissonant voices are there in the same chorus! so that whoever now wishes to become an author, cannot possibly avoid exposing himself to many assailants. . . . If I had known what it is to possess a distinguished name, I should have used every effort to prevent any but my servants from knowing Erasmus."†

One charge, however, brought by the monks against Erasmus, was partly a just one, that he had prepared the way for Luther. *Erasmus*, as they used to say, *laid the egg, and Luther hatched it*.

There can be no doubt that the examination of the works of the ancient Greeks, which, in consequence of the fall of Constantinople, were conveyed to Europe, was a most important means of promoting the Reformation. For the

* Knight's Life, p. 289.

† Eras. P. Tomicio, Op. tom. iii. p. 1693, edit. Bas.

effect of the revival of the study of the immortal writers of antiquity was that the human mind was aroused from its slumber, and pushed its inquiries into that vast and complex system of error which the Roman Catholic Church had declared to be essential to the salvation of its followers. *Now*, as we have seen in our introductory chapter, classical students were to be found in various parts of Europe. But Erasmus had been greatly instrumental in promoting the love and study of the works of the ancient writers. I have already described his "Adages," which are a monument of his profound erudition, his amazing industry, and his extensive knowledge of classical authors. He had also translated almost the whole of Lucian, most of the moral works of Plutarch, some orations of Libanius, and several plays of Euripides into Latin, avowedly for the purpose of perfecting himself in the Greek language. He also published afterwards editions of the works of Aristotle and Demosthenes, Livy, Terence, Pliny, Cicero's "Offices," and his "Tusculan Disputations," Q. Curtius, the minor historians, Seneca the philosopher, Suetonius, and some minor works. The last were chiefly for the use of Dean Colet's school. I shall call attention hereafter to another remarkable work, the "Ciceronianus." These have, in consequence of the improvement in classical scholarship, long since given place to better editions. Scholars have, however, expressed their obligations to him, as well as their admiration of the amazing industry, the great genius, and the vast learning of a man who, though unaided by lexicons, commentaries, and annotations, and hindered in his work by the scarcity of books, the difficulty of procuring ancient manuscripts, the want of chronological tables, and other aids, was able to carry through the press voluminous works, the preparation and publication of which would, even now, when these and other appliances are available, and when a great improve-

ment has been effected in the art of printing, task the energies of the most diligent scholar of the age in which we live.

But we must consider the purpose to which this scholarship was applied, in order that we may see how he prepared the way for the Reformation. The chapter on the "*Novum Instrumentum*," and the account of the "*Paraphrases*," will serve to illustrate this part of our subject. No doubt the latter, by promoting the study of the Scriptures, aided the Reformers in their work. By publishing the New Testament in the original tongue, he enabled theologians to see the purity of their doctrine. He further imposed upon himself the herculean task of bringing out, one after another, editions of the early Fathers of the Church—a task which we may well contemplate with wonder, for it involved greater labour even than the publication of the works of the classical writers. He published the works of Jerome, Hilary, Ambrose, Irenæus, St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, part of St. Basil's works, some works of Lactantius and Epiphanius, Cyprian, the pseudo-Arnobius, some treatises of St. Athanasius, and others; thus showing to the world that their doctrines agreed with those of the Reformers, that the Church of Rome had corrupted as well as mutilated the faith once delivered to the saints, and affording us the means of reforming our Church according to the Scriptural model of the earliest ages.

But satire was the most formidable weapon wielded by Erasmus. We have seen how, in his "*Praise of Folly*," he used it against the Schoolmen. He has also shown the barrenness of their system in his more serious works. By these combined methods he did more than anyone else to emancipate the human mind from its bondage to the scholastic philosophy, and to prepare Europe for the teaching of the Gospels. He attacked also, with the same

weapon, the vices, the follies, and the superstitions of the age in which he lived. In all probability, if he had condemned them in a graver form, a cry of indignation would have rung through Europe, and he would have been called upon to expiate his offence in the dungeon or at the stake. But his sportive wit ensured his impunity. The authorities in Church and State, even though they might be fully sensible of the danger of his opinions, could not place under ban and anathema works which the world received with undissembled merriment. When in the "Praise of Folly" he ridiculed the ignorance, the absurdities, and the formalism of the monks, and inveighed against them on account of their encouragement of superstition, as well as their disregard of every social and relative obligation ; when in the same work, and in his Colloquies, two of which, given in former chapters, may serve as a specimen of the rest, he did not conceal his scorn for the superstitions of the age, almost every one of which he caused to pass in review before his readers ; when afterwards changing his playful wit for indignant satire, he assailed Popes, Monarchs, Cardinals, and Bishops, with his merciless raillery ; we cannot fail to see that he must have prepared the way for that Reformation of doctrine and manners which has been a blessing to generations then unborn.

But we must consider also the opinions of Erasmus, if we would see clearly how far the Reformers were indebted to him. Now I am quite willing to admit that he was a hasty writer, that he was occasionally guilty of inaccuracies, and that he may have given expression to some views which were not the result of his deliberate judgment. He wrote thus to his friend Robert Aldridge, Bishop of Carlisle : "The advice which you give me respecting the revision of my works is of no use. I am naturally extempore, and very little inclined to examine what I have written. And you know how difficult it is for an old man to fight against

nature.”* But still I have no hesitation in saying that he was firmly convinced that many of the doctrines of the Church of Rome were condemned alike by reason and by revelation. He ridiculed, for instance, in the “Praise of Folly” those who “derive comfort from false pardons, and indulgences, and who measure the spaces of purgatory as with an hour-glass; who, having cast down a small piece of money, taken from that vast amount which they have gained unjustly, think that all the guilt of their life is purged away.”† Lystrius had indeed in a note in an edition published about the time when Luther began his career, explained that Papal indulgences are not here referred to unless they be false. He had, however, made matters worse by adding immediately: “This one thing I know, that what Christ promised respecting the remission of sins is more certain than what is promised by men, especially since this whole affair of indulgences is of recent date and invention. Finally a great many people, relying on these pardons, are encouraged in crime, and never think of changing their lives.”‡ Take again what he says in that severe and powerful passage in which he describes the appearance of monks on the judgment-day:§ “Whence comes this new race of Jews? I acknowledge one law as really mine, of which I hear nothing. Formerly, when on earth, without a parable, I promised my Father’s inheritance not to austerities, prayers, or fastings, but to faith, and the offices of charity. I do not acknowledge those who make much of their good deeds.” Again he speaks of the folly of worshipping a little image marked with a coal on the wall, in the same manner as Christ himself.|| He had also, as we have seen in his Colloquies, derided the worship and adoration as well

* Op. tom. iii. p. 893, edit. Bas.

† See pages 81, 82.

‡ See also Basle edition of 1676, cum commentariis Gul. Lystri, et figuris J. Holbenii.

§ See page 91.

|| See page 87.

of images as of relics. He thus spoke of the worship of the Virgin Mary and the Saints. "Some there are who have prayers addressed to them on all occasions, especially the Virgin Mary, to whom the common people attribute more power than they do to her Son. Now from these Saints, what, I say, do men ask, excepting those things which relate to folly?"* In the "Shipwreck," while one addressed himself with loud cries to one Saint, one to another, there is one calm person shown as the only true Christian among them, who addressed himself to God alone. In a letter written soon after Luther began his career, he openly declared that Rome had long since become Babylon; that a very great Reformation was required; that all pious men expressed with sighs their earnest desires for it; and that Luther, when he began to preach, became the most popular man whom the world had ever seen, because men thought that he was honest and courageous, and that he had been raised up by God to apply a remedy to the evils which were the subject of complaint.† Here Erasmus follows the illustrious Dante and Petrarch, and many distinguished men before them, in that identification of Rome with Babylon, which unquestionably did much to promote the Reformation.

The *Enchiridion* is, as we have seen, directed against those who asserted that true religion consisted in the acceptance of scholastic dogmas, or the performance of outward ceremonies. In it he expresses, besides, some opinions which agree with those of the Reformers. He evidently thinks little of the worship of the image of Christ, of Saints, and of relics, but he thinks much of the imitation of their holy and blessed example.‡ "No worship," he says, "is more acceptable to many than the attempt to

* See page 82.

† Eras. *Jod. Jonæ*, op. tom. iii. p. 550, edit. Bas.

‡ Op. tom. v. p. 27, edit. Bas.

imitate her humility ; none is more pleasing to the Saints than the laborious endeavour to exhibit in your own life a transcript of their virtues. If you adore the bones of Paul, buried in a chest, will you not show respect to the mind of Paul, exhibited in his writings ?” Look again at the attack which he made on the monks. “ I think nothing of your vigils, your fastings, your silence, your prayers, and your other observances of the same description. I will not believe that a man can be in the Spirit, unless I see the fruits of the Spirit. Why should I not declare you to be in the flesh, when, after your exercises of this kind, which are almost worldly, I see in you still the works of the flesh ? I refer to your envy, greater than that of a woman ; to your anger and fierceness, like that of a soldier ; to your unappeasable love of strife ; to your railing accusations ; to your slanderous tongue, which poisons like a viper’s ; to your stubbornness, your slippery faith, your vanity, your lying, your flattery.”* Look, too, at his condemnation of the distinction drawn in the Church of Rome between sins mortal and venial. “ You must take care not to despise any one sin, as if it were of little consequence. In this matter many are deceiving themselves, so that while they freely indulge themselves in one or another vice, which every one looks upon as venial, they strongly condemn sins of another description.”† Consider also his exhortations to a diligent study of the Scriptures, as a means of victory in our spiritual warfare. “ How, I ask, did Jesus Christ, our Head, conquer Satan ? Did He not, when he answered Him from Scripture, strike the forehead of His enemy, as David conquered Goliath with stones taken from the brook ?”‡ Examine also the following observations on the performance of rites and ceremonies. “ You think that a lighted taper

* Op. tom. v. p. 30, edit. Bas. † Ibid. p. 47. ‡ Ibid. p. 10.

is a sacrifice. But David calls the sacrifices of God a broken spirit. Of what use is it for the body to be covered with a holy cowl, when the soul wears a filthy garment?" If you have a snow-white tunic, take care that the vestments of the inner man are white as snow. . . . You tell me that you worship the wood of the cross. Follow much more the mystery of the cross. You fast and abstain from those things which do not pollute the man; and yet you do not refrain from impure words which defile your own conscience, and the consciences of others. . . . You adorn a temple of stone. You have a reverence for sacred places. What matters all this, if the temple of your breast, whose wall Ezekiel pierced through, is profaned with the abominations of Egypt? . . . Can it avail you with your body to have gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, when your mind within is like Sodom, Egypt, or Babylon? It is not a matter of much importance for you to place your feet in the footprints of Christ; but it is a matter of paramount importance for you to follow them with your affections. If you think much of a visit to the sepulchre of our Lord, should you not think still more of acting out in your life the mystery of his burial? . . . The more you love Christ, the more will you hate your sins; for the hatred of sin must follow the love of piety, as the shadow accompanies the body. I would rather that you should *once* hate your sins truly within, than *ten times* confess them in the language of abhorrence to a priest."* When we read all these extracts, we must surely admit that there is some truth in those words, "Erasmus laid the egg, and Luther hatched it."

Again, when we find him in his Commentary on Matthew xvi. 18, "On this rock I will build My Church," expressing his surprise that any one should have so perverted these

* Op. tom. v. pp. 32, 33, edit. Bas.

words as to apply them exclusively to the Roman Pontiff, to whom indeed they apply first of all, as the Head of the Christian Church, yet not to him only, but to all Christians ; when again we find him saying on Matt. xvii. 5, that "Christ is. the only Teacher appointed by God, and that this authority has been committed to no Bishop, Pope, or Prince ;" when further we find him inveighing against pretended relics in a note on Matt. xxiii. 5, "for to be seen of men ;" animadverting on the royal palaces of St. Peter's vicar, when speaking of the lodging of Peter with one Simon a tanner, mentioned in Acts ix. 43 ; expressing doubts in his notes whether marriage was a Sacrament, attacking the celibacy of the clergy, and expressing the wish in that noble passage already quoted from his "Paraclesis," that the Scriptures might be translated into all the languages in the world ; when further we find him saying in his "Spongia" against Hutten that he "allows the first place amongst Metropolitans to the Roman Pontiffs, but that he has never defended the extravagant power which they have usurped for some centuries ;" we must admit that he had done his best to shake to its foundation the structure of their spiritual and temporal dominion.

I could easily bring forward numerous other passages from his writings of a similar tone and tendency. We might, however, suppose that though Erasmus was thus outspoken in the expression of his opinion, his books would have a limited sale, and so he would be unable to influence public opinion in Europe. But we shall find that the very contrary was the case. The sale of his works is a perfect marvel in the history of literature. His opinions flew on the wings of the press throughout Europe. We should say that when we take into account that the number of readers in those days was a mere handful when compared with the number at the present time, and that the resources of printing establishments were very

different from what they now are, the sale of his works was far greater in proportion than the sale of those of the most popular author of the age in which we live. The "Praise of Folly" and the "Colloquies" were in every palace, in every house, in every school, in every monastery. A bookseller at Paris, on giving out that the latter work was prohibited, sold above 24,000 of one impression.* Both these works were translated into many of the languages of Europe. A Spanish friend informed Erasmus that in Spain his "Colloquies" were flying through the hands of men and women.† The "Praise of Folly," in a few months after its publication, went through seven editions. In April, 1515, Rhenanus wrote to Erasmus to say that, out of an edition of 1800 of the "Praise of Folly," just printed by Froben, with notes by Lystrius, only sixty remained on hand.‡ After this edition the sale was very rapid, for the notes just referred to had made it intelligible to many who had not previously understood the object of the author. The monks, whose ignorance of Latin was so great that they could not understand the psalms which they read every day, now, when it was translated into modern languages, understood the diatribes against them, and vented their indignation upon Erasmus. Twenty-seven editions of this popular work were published during his life-time.

His "Adages" also had an extraordinary sale. The first edition, imperfect as we have seen, was printed at Paris in 1500. Two more editions were soon afterwards brought out at Strasburg; and a fourth was printed at Venice in 1508. Froben, without the knowledge of Erasmus, had, before his acquaintance with him, imitated it at Basle in 1513. In 1517 Froben printed a sixth edition of this work, which

* Knight's "Life," p. 203.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 1715, edit. Lugd.

‡ Seebohm's "Oxford Reformers," p. 312.

had now become a thick folio volume. The sale of this edition was, considering the size, very rapid; for it was followed in 1520 by a larger folio edition containing 800 pages. We shall understand the full significance of the sale of this work with reference to the progress of the Reformation, when we remember that it not only diffused that knowledge of classical literature which, as we have seen, greatly aided it, but that it also became the means of making known to the world, as I have shown, the indignation which Erasmus felt when he saw the base conduct of the monarchs of Europe, and the vices, the follies, the impostures, and the scandals of the Church and Court of Rome. I need not dwell upon the rapid sale of the "Enchiridion," as it was mentioned in a former chapter. Two separate collections of some of his letters were printed by Froben in 1518, and became the means of propagating through Europe the views expressed to his friends on the corruptions of the Church of Rome. I shall have occasion to refer to these letters hereafter. The letter to Volzcius, already referred to, attached to the new edition of the "Enchiridion," called for in 1518, in which he censured, with impetuous acrimony, monks, Schoolmen, ecclesiastics, and princes, was eagerly read all over Europe, and passed, in a short time, through several editions. Another edition of the "Enchiridion" itself was published at Cologne the next year. Many, even in bigoted Roman Catholic countries, who would have been unwilling to read works written by the leading Reformers, quite devoured the works of Erasmus, and were ultimately led to promote the progress of the Reformation. Multitudes in Spain, where the Pope had more devoted adherents than in any European country, eagerly, but unconsciously, imbibed the heretical poison contained in the "Enchiridion." "There is scarcely any one," writes Alphonzo Fernandez to Erasmus, "in the Court of the

Emperor, any citizen of our cities, or member of our churches and convents, no not even an hotel or country inn, that has not a copy of the ‘*Enchiridion*’ of Erasmus in Spanish. This short work has made the name of Erasmus a household word in circles where it was previously unknown and had not been heard of.”* This letter was written on November 27th, 1527. In quoting it, as well as referring to one or two other facts, I have a little departed from the proper order of events; but I have found it necessary to do so in order that I may illustrate this part of our subject. Thus, then, he did the work of the Reformers in circles to which they could not have obtained access. The wit with which some of his works were seasoned, became like the honey which, as the poet says, nurses place on the edge of the vessel in order that children may be led to take the healing medicinal draught.† Many Romanists, attracted in this manner—many also who, not caring for the wit, read his works on account of the learning and reputation of the author, when they would not have read those of a leading Reformer—learnt from him the errors of the Church of Rome, and became afterwards the most zealous in conveying a knowledge of them to others. Thus Erasmus promoted the progress of the Reformation throughout the Continent of Europe.

* *Life and Writings of “Juan de Valdez,”* by Benjamin Wiffen, London, Quaritch, 1865, p. 41.

† Così all’egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso,
Succhi amari ingannato intanto ci beve,
E dall’ inganno suo vita riceve.

Tasso, “*Gerusalemme Liberata*,” can. i. s. 3.

CHAPTER IX.

GRADUAL ALIENATION FROM THE REFORMERS.—TREATISE
ON FREE-WILL AND COLLOQUIES.—(A.D. 1519—1524.)

ON January 12, 1519, the Emperor Maximilian died. This was an important event in its bearing upon the history of the Reformation. Charles, King of Spain, and Francis I. of France, were candidates for the vacant dignity. Leo X. objected to the election of either of them. He thought that Charles, as King of Spain and Naples, and master of the new world, and Francis as King of France and Duke of Milan, would acquire a degree of power prejudicial to the independence of the Roman see, and to the liberties of Europe. As he was anxious through the influence of Frederic, the Elector of Saxony, in the Electoral college to prevent the election of either of them, he resolved to suspend all proceedings against Luther.

Now, every one acquainted with the history of the period is aware that the crown was first offered to Frederic. He, however, declined it because he thought that he had not sufficient power to ensure the safety of Germany; and recommended the electors to appoint Charles, as his hereditary dominions would constitute a barrier against the threatened invasion from Turkey, and as he possessed a numerous army which would enable him to beat back the Turkish hordes. The result was that Charles was unani-

mously elected. Erasmus, writing to Bishop Fisher, describes this magnanimous conduct of the Elector. "Charles never would have borne the imperial title if it had not been declined by Frederic, whose glory in refusing the honour was greater than if he had accepted it. In the same noble spirit he firmly refused the 30,000 florins offered him by our people" (the agents of Charles). "When he was urged at least to allow 10,000 florins to be given to his servants, 'They may take them,' he said, 'if they like, but no one shall remain my servant another day who accepts a single piece of gold!' The next day" (continued Erasmus) "he took horse and departed, lest they should continue to worry him. This was related to me as an entirely trustworthy statement by the Bishop of Liège, who was present at the Imperial Diet."*

Thus, then, Charles was called to preside over the destinies of Germany. Very soon after his election we find him courting the alliance of the Pope, as a means of enabling him to stay his rival Francis I. in his onward career of ambition. The former was at first unwilling to aid either of these monarchs in the prosecution of their schemes. At length he determined to make common cause with Charles. He thought that when he had, by his assistance, humbled Francis, he might expel him also from the soil of Italy. Charles had, with the view of securing the alliance of the Pope, determined on sacrificing Luther to his vengeance. The subject of the condemnation of Luther was now debated in the Papal conclave. The Pope was at first disposed to make some concessions to him, because he thought that he would thus be induced to desist from lifting up his voice against the corruptions of the Church. At length, overcome by the importunity of others, he issued, on June 15th, 1520,

* Op. tom. iii. p. 511, edit. Lugd.

that famous Bull against Luther, which directed his works to be given to the flames, and himself and his adherents to be seized and to be brought to Rome.

Erasmus, soon after this time, wrote a letter to Noviomagus with reference to this Bull: "I fear," he says, "for the unfortunate Luther; so violent is the conspiracy, and so strongly have the Pope and princes been instigated against him. Would to God he had followed my advice, and had abstained from odious and seditious proceedings. He would then have done more good, and exposed himself to less hatred. It would be no great matter that one man should perish; but if the monks have the upper hand they will destroy literature. They begin again to attack Reuchlin only because they hate Luther."*

Erasmus wrote a letter soon after this time to his friend, Cardinal Campegius, in which he expressed his disapprobation of this Bull. "All the world," he says, "have accounted Leo's Bull too severe, and not reconcilable with the mild temper of that Pontiff." The same letter also contains the following remarkable declaration respecting Luther. "I have not myself read more than twelve pages of his works, and those hastily, but even in that hasty reading I have discerned great natural talents, and a singular faculty for explaining the Holy Scriptures. I have heard excellent men, equally remarkable for their learning and their piety, congratulate themselves on having been made acquainted with his books. I observed that in proportion as they were of blameless character, and the more nearly they approached to evangelical purity, the less hostile they were to him. His moral character was highly praised by some who could not endure his doctrine. As to his spirit, which God alone can with certainty judge, I choose rather to think

* Op. tom. iii. p. 414, edit. Bas.

too favourably, than too badly of it. To tell the truth, the Christian world has long been weary of those teachers who attach too much importance to trifling inventions and human constitutions, and thirsts after the pure and living water drawn from the sources of the Apostles and Evangelists. Luther seemed to me well fitted by nature for this work, and inflamed with zeal for the prosecution of it. Thus far I have favoured Luther : I have favoured the good which I saw, or fancied that I saw, in him."

But though he thus condemned the Pope's Bull, and approved of Luther, he was still determined to adhere to the See of Rome. "What have I to do with Luther, or what have I to expect from him, that I should join him to oppose the Church of Rome which is a true part of the Church Catholic, or to oppose the Roman Pontiff, who is the Head of the Catholic Church ; I who should be unwilling to resist the Bishop of my own diocese ? I am not so impious as to dissent from the Church, or so ungrateful as to oppose Leo, from whom I have received so many favours, and by whom I have been treated with so much indulgence." At the same time, notwithstanding these expressions, he concludes his letter with expressing his strong disapprobation of the severity of Leo, as well as of the vehemence of the German Reformers.*

Erasmus here comes forward as a peacemaker between the contending parties. But the advice which he gives was not likely to be followed by either of them. The Roman Catholics would not be induced by his favourable report of Luther to give him a fair hearing ; for they considered him as a dangerous heretic, whose success would be immediately followed by the subversion of that system from which they derived immense pecuniary advantage. Erasmus should

* Op. tom. iii. p. 444, edit. Bas.

have seen that it was absurd to suppose that the authorities of the Church of Rome would have listened to the advice of an insignificant monk. They might just as well be expected to deal leniently with Luther, as the worst tyrant to become a paragon of clemency, and to refrain from indulging in the excesses of arbitrary power. Not satisfied with assailing the abuses and corruptions of the Church of Rome, he had recently attacked the Pontificate itself. "It is horrible," he said, "to see a man calling himself the Vicar of Jesus Christ, displaying a magnificence such as no Emperor ever equals. Is this being like the poor Jesus or the humble St. Peter? We are told that he is the lord of the world. But Christ, whose Vicar he boasts of being, has said, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' And shall the kingdom of a Vicar extend beyond that of his Lord?"* Thus, then, the Pope would see the real nature of the contest between himself and Luther. He must resign that temporal power which he believed to have been transmitted to him from the earliest ages for the government of the Church. Erasmus, in his excessive desire for peace, must have forgotten the motives which usually influence the conduct of our fellow-creatures, or he could not have supposed that any consideration would have induced Rome to refrain from raising her hand for the purpose of striking a terrible blow at the bold man who had thus dared to assail the structure of her temporal domination. On the other hand, if Luther had recanted when the Pope fulminated his anathemas against him, he would have lost the fruit of all the successes which he had hitherto obtained; and, if he persevered, he must expose himself to the charge of sedition and turbulence. He felt that if he did not lift up his voice against the corruptions of the Church of Rome, he would

* Luther, *Opp. lib. xvii. p. 457.*

become a traitor to the King of kings. Erasmus, by his condemnation of their vehemence, gave great offence to the German Reformers. Though he declared that he would remain faithful in his allegiance to the Pope, he found that his sentiments were as unpopular as those of Luther with the members of the Church of Rome. They dealt tenderly with him, and did not anathematize him, notwithstanding his seeming agreement with Luther, and his unsparing censure of their vices and corruptions, because they thought that if they drove him to extremities he would openly throw himself into the camp of the Reformers, and lend them the aid of his herculean strength in making a deadly onset on the great Papal army.

Luther, not long after the issuing of the Bull, declared by a public act his separation from the Church of Rome. A fire was kindled at the east gate of Wittemberg, near the holy cross, into which, in the presence of a large concourse of the doctors and students of the University, he threw the Canon Law, the Decretals of the Popes, and the Papal Bull. Thus, then, having burnt his ships on the shore, he showed that his only hope was in advancing against the enemy.

The question now universally discussed was whether Frederic would permit the execution of the Bull within his territories. He was now at Aix-la-Chapelle, to which place he had gone for the purpose of assisting in placing on the brows of the youthful Charles the diadem of the Holy Roman Empire. Immediately after the ceremony, the Emperor, with the princes, ministers, and ambassadors, went to Cologne. Aleander and Carracioli were sent to him as Papal nuncios, avowedly for the purpose of congratulating him on his accession, but really to urge him to do his utmost to suppress the Reformation. The former was not, as Luther and others supposed, of Jewish extraction, but was of an ancient race. Alexander VI. had appointed him

secretary to his son, that monster in human shape, Cæsar Borgia. Erasmus, who was acquainted with him, says of him, "Aleander lived at Venice as a base epicurean, and in high dignities."* Luther in a diatribe against him, which is a good specimen of his polemic style, says of him, "He is soon provoked, and passionate even to frenzy; insatiably covetous, and equally lustful; arrogant to the last degree, and eaten up with pride and vanity." All, however, admit that he was vehement, indefatigable, and devoted to the interests of the Papacy.

Soon after his arrival he presented to Charles the Papal Bull. In doing so he said, "The Pope knows how to bring three grammarians to good behaviour." He alluded to Luther, Melanchthon, and Erasmus. Erasmus, who was at this time staying at the house of Count Nuenar, the provost of Cologne, was at the audience. He at first proposed to the Emperor the burning of Luther's books and papers; but he very soon disclosed his real object, and asked for an edict directed against his person. The Emperor hesitated to comply with this demand. He knew that in consequence of the delay in the first instance to take measures against him, and the opportunity which he had possessed of disseminating his opinions during the vacancy in the Empire, when its affairs were administered by his friend, the Elector of Saxony, a powerful party had rallied round the Reformer which it would be dangerous to offend. He told Aleander that he must ask the opinion of the Elector. Accordingly Aleander went to him. In his usual impetuous manner, interrupting Carracioli, who wanted by mildness and flattery to work upon the Elector, he required him to burn his writings, and to deliver him up as a prisoner to the Pope.† Frederic at first hesitated. Shall he who, animated by the spirit of the

* Jortin's "Life" vol. i. p. 546.

† Pallavicini, p. 86.

Crusaders, had visited the Holy Sepulchre, shall he who had always been an ardent supporter of the authority of the Pope, become a rebel against him, and forfeit his reputation for piety, and zeal on behalf of the Church? He asked time to deliberate. He was now urged by his nephew, John Frederick, by Spalatin, who has left us an account of these transactions, and by his other counsellors, not to abandon Luther. At length he made up his mind on the subject. For a short time he had hesitated; but the love of truth and justice finally prevailed. His counsellors, on the 4th of November, in compliance with instructions which they had received from the Elector, told Aleander that no one had shown him that Luther's writings had been refuted, and ought to be cast into the fire, and required a safe conduct that he might appear before learned and impartial judges. Aleander, on hearing this reply, so different from that which he expected, as he thought that the Elector would be afraid of the danger to which he would be exposed in the event of his refusal, asked time to deliberate. When he was again admitted to the presence of the counsellors, on finding that all his efforts to shake their determination were in vain, he said, in a tone of affected indifference: "That the Pope did not care to soil his hands with the blood of the wretch, but that he should certainly execute the Bull, and burn his writings."

Erasmus was, as I have said, at this time, at Cologne. He had been summoned to the city by princes who wished to have his advice on various important matters which were to come under deliberation. The Elector, aware that great weight would be attached to his opinion, sent to ask him to pay him a visit, that he might consult with him on the present crisis. The importance of that interview cannot well be exaggerated. Upon its result depended the safety of Luther, and perhaps the progress of the Reformation in

Germany. The Reformers trembled for the consequences. They thought that the Elector would be guided by the opinion of Erasmus; and they judged from his vacillating temper, and from his known anxiety to stand well with the Rulers of the Church, that he would give him such advice as would lead him to deliver Luther up to those who were thirsting for his blood. Spalatin, who was present, has given us the following description of the conference :* “It took place in December. Erasmus, the Prince, and Spalatin conversed together, standing by the fire-side. The Elector proposed to Erasmus that he should speak in Dutch, which was his native language; but Erasmus chose rather to speak Latin. The Elector, though he understood that language, conversed with him through Spalatin. He said to him at once: ‘What is your opinion of Luther?’” “Erasmus,” says Spalatin, “surprised at so direct a question, stood musing, and delayed to give him an answer; while Frederic, as his custom was, when he was discoursing earnestly with any one, gave him a searching look. The latter said at length, in a half-joking tone: ‘Luther has been guilty of two crimes; he has attacked the crown of the Popes, and the bellies of the monks.’ The Elector smiled; but, at the same time, gave Erasmus to understand that he spoke seriously. The former then told him very plainly that good men and lovers of the Gospel had taken the least offence at Luther; that they were much displeased at the cruelty of the Bull, so unworthy of the mild and merciful Vicar of Jesus Christ; that the origin of the whole dispute was to be found in the monks and their hatred for literature; that two Universities had condemned Luther, but had not confuted him; that his request was very reasonable to be tried by impartial judges; that the Pope was more anxious about

* Spalatin, Hist. M.S. in Seckendorf, p. 291.

his own glory than the honour of Jesus Christ ; that the treatises hitherto written against Luther were condemned even by those who differed from him ; that the world was now inflamed with a great love for evangelical truth, and that this love ought not to be discouraged ; and that it would be very improper for Charles to begin his reign with acts of severity and violence." Spalatin informs us that he was rejoiced at the result of this interview. He accompanied the illustrious scholar to his lodgings, where he at once committed to writing the substance of what he had said to the Elector, and gave it to Spalatin. No sooner had he done so, than he endeavoured to induce Spalatin to return the manuscript. He was afraid that the nuncio would see it, and that it would lower him in the good opinion of the Papal party. Spalatin, however, at once refused compliance with his request.

The fears just referred to were not without foundation. All zealous Romanists never forgave him his conduct at Cologne. They felt that he had inflicted a grievous injury on their cause at a most important crisis of the world's history. Pallavicini, the Roman Catholic historian, relates that he held the Pope's Bull to be a forgery, and that he would not be convinced of the contrary till Aleander allowed him to examine it ; that he went about, like Nicodemus, by night, to the Emperor and his counsellors, endeavouring to alienate their affections from the Pope and Aleander, telling them that the Bull had been extorted, contrary to the Pope's inclinations, by the artifices of evil disposed persons, and that in a conversation with Aleander, he had expressed a hope that the order for the burning of Luther's books might be rescinded.* These, however, were reports probably circulated by Aleander,

* Pallavicini, vol. i. p. 87.

for the purpose of lowering Erasmus in the estimation of the Roman Catholic party. Thus Erasmus rendered a service to the Reformers at this most important juncture. We know that the Elector, fortified by his opinion, advocated Luther's cause very warmly with the Emperor; and that he was more confirmed in his determination not to deliver an innocent man into the hands of his merciless adversaries.

Erasmus, in the midst of the events just referred to, published an edition of his letters. The volume containing them was very much valued by all who wished to become intimately acquainted with the great scholar. So high was the place which he occupied in the republic of letters, that learned men became anxious, not only to see the treasures which he had drawn from the great store-house of classical or theological antiquity, but also to know all that he said in a jesting or serious manner in his private letters to his friends. We are here admitted to the contemplation of his inner life. As he was of a very communicative disposition, and could not, if the matter were one in which he took a deep interest, conceal his real sentiments from his friends, and sometimes even from his enemies, the springs of his actions, which would otherwise have been hidden, his hopes and his fears, his faults, his follies, and his virtues, are here unveiled to us. We seem, as we read the letters, extracts from which have been given, to have Erasmus once more before us on the stage of life; to hear the relation of his trials and perplexities; to be sitting with him in the midst of More's happy family; to hear his altercation with the custom-house officers; and to listen to him as in an emphatic tone, and with lively gestures, he gives us his views on religious questions, or on those great events which were shaking to their foundation the kingdoms of the earth. They are perhaps the most interesting letters that have ever

been published. They are remarkable for their easy style and their learning, and form a most interesting biographical sketch of Erasmus.

The wonder is that when he decided on the publication of his letters, he should have thrown them confusedly together, without any regard to dates, or the places from which they are written, which are often incorrectly given. Many have no date assigned to them. The pleasure of reading them is diminished when we find in them the events of boyhood succeeding those of old age; when we come to the end of a particular narration before we have heard the beginning; when we see events mingled together without any regard to chronology, so that it is very difficult to obtain from them a connected account of his life. Attempts have been made to remedy this evil, and to extract order from confusion, but only with partial success. In a letter to his friend Rhenanus, which stands first in the Basle edition of 1540, he gave the following reasons for the publication of them:—*

He said that this matter had caused him much vexation. As he found that incorrect collections of them had been made even when he was in Italy, he thought it better to give an edition of them himself than to leave it to others. He at the same time protested that it never was his intention to publish them. He added that, as he had spoken freely in those letters on many important points, he could not avoid giving offence. The monks, especially, who were enemies to literature, condemned them strongly; and when the Lutheran contentions began, they were still more censured than before, and accused of favouring Lutheranism, at a time when it was neither safe to speak, nor safe to keep silence. Then he said that he would have suppressed them, but that Froben would not give his consent. He even de-

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1, edit. Bas.

sired Rhenanus to pay Froben his expenses, and to withdraw the copies. He afterwards quoted the lines of Horace having reference to the danger of the publication of an account of contemporary events :

“ Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ
Tractas, et incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.”*

Soon after this time Erasmus began to be an object of dislike and suspicion to Luther and his associates. The more violent among them were very angry with him because he seemed to them to be continually endeavouring to reconcile what they considered to be irreconcilable ; because he was continually advancing half-way to meet them, and afterwards retiring towards the camp of their foes. The fate which had befallen Luther had only confirmed Erasmus in his determination not to compromise his safety, or to injure his prospects in life, by openly making common cause with him. Luther had just stood at Worms before one of the most august tribunals which had ever been summoned to sit in judgment on human offenders. He had, indeed, gone forth unscathed from that regal assembly, after having declared his determination not to retract one of his opinions. His departure was, however, immediately followed by a sentence directing the seizure of himself and his adherents after his safe conduct had expired. Afterwards his friend, the Elector, apprehensive of the consequences, directed him to be carried off and concealed in the castle of Wartburg, which is buried in the gloomy recesses of the forests of Thuringia. Erasmus hereupon wrote a letter to his friend Jodocus Jonas, a Lutheran, in which, after having deplored the lot of Luther and his associates, and ascribed it to their want of moderation, he derived from it an argument for the course which he still intended to pursue. He said, “ If

* Hor. lib. ii. carm. 1. l. 6—8.

our rulers require unreasonable things, we must submit, lest worse things ensue. If the present age cannot receive the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is something to preach it in part, and as far as possible. Above all things we should avoid a schism, which is dangerous to all good men. There is a certain pious craft, and innocent time-serving, to which, however, we must have recourse, so as not to betray the cause of religion.”* But if Luther and his followers had been moderate, and had spoken in the winning accents of conciliation, they would have been equally unsuccessful in influencing the Court of Rome, for it was opposed to their doctrine; and if, apprehensive of a worse state of things, they had submitted to arbitrary will, had been time-serving, and had preached the Gospel in part, they must have run into error, and assented to falsehood; the light just kindled would have been extinguished; and Europe would have crouched beneath the iron yoke of the oppressor. While, however, we deplore his infirmity of purpose, we think that much may be said to excuse or extenuate the conduct of Erasmus; and we cannot fail to sympathize with one who thus wrote to Bilibald Pirckheimer: “We see our weakness, or rather our misery. We see an age abounding in monsters and prodigies, so that I know not what part to take; only this I know, that my conscience has confidence before the Lord Jesus Christ, who is my Judge. Those who are the Pope’s agents draw the chains of ancient tyranny very close. They seem disposed rather to add to than to diminish our burdens. On the other hand they who in the name of Luther profess to defend evangelical liberty, act in a spirit which I do not understand; at least, many persons join them whom I should not like for coadjutors if I were concerned in the matter. They who are of a licentious temper find occasion to indulge

* Op., tom. iii. p. 550, edit. Bas.

it from the Lutheran writings. . . . The authority of Bulls is weighty, the ordinances of the Emperor still more so, but will they change the heart ?”*

We can easily imagine that language like this, addressed to leading members of the Lutheran party and to others, would not lessen the feelings of exasperation with which they regarded him. They had hoped that they should prevent him from aiding their opponents in fighting their battles, and that his powerful arm might assist them in mowing down, like the bearded grain, the hosts confederate against them. But hitherto, as I have said, they had been disappointed in their expectations. Irritated by his conduct, they began to libel him as an apostate, as a man who might be hired for a morsel of bread for any purpose, and who was ever ready to pay court to Popes, Bishops, and Cardinals, in order that he might accomplish his own selfish and worldly purposes. We cannot wonder that a man who had hitherto heard only the language of commendation and flattery, and that, too, from the highest of this world's potentates, should have been inflamed with anger when he heard the opprobrious epithets now applied to him. Accordingly he soon ceased any longer to be on good terms with the Lutherans, and wrote very bitterly against them. “They were men of a seditious mind ; some of them feared neither God nor man, insomuch that Luther and Melancthon judged it necessary to write against them.” “In the Lutheran party are persons who are influenced by a spirit widely different from that of the Gospel.” This hostility was at first confined within the limits of epistolary correspondence. At length the two parties came to open warfare. The quarrel between Hutten and Erasmus will serve to show the unhappy spirit with which they were animated.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 707, edit. Lugd.

Ulrich von Hutten was of an ancient family in Franconia, a knight of the German Empire, a soldier, brave in war, but much given to personal quarrels. He had some good qualities, among which may be mentioned especially a profound contempt for the religion of the monks and Schoolmen, whom he constantly assailed with his pen, and attacked with satire and invective. He was a dauntless and turbulent man, who delighted on every opportunity to gird on his sword and to plunge into the thick of the battle. His moral character was not blameless. He was in the early part of his life at Cologne, where he studied the modern languages and poetry. There was a time when Erasmus described him as "the most eloquent of knights, the most bellicose of orators, of a nature the most frank and open, deserving the love of all good men."

Hutten has been ascertained to be the author of a remarkable work, called, "The Letters of Obscure Men," which, on their first appearance, caused an astonishing sensation. "More," says a recent writer, "was effected by satire, which, like a thunderbolt out of a fair sky, came down unexpectedly and crushingly on the bands of the lovers of darkness, and completed their moral death in Europe, than by all the speculative controversial writings, and all the decrees of the powerful. Such were the far-famed 'Letters of Obscure Men.' " *

Erasmus taught Hutten and others the power of this terrible weapon. The letters purport to be written to Ortuinus Gratius, the head of the theological faculty in Cologne, by his former pupils. They are purposely written in execrable Latin, and contain the grossest blunders. The most absurd arguments are advanced in them for ignorance and darkness, and even for the grossest immorality. Erasmus appears in them in such a manner as to show his bitter hatred

* Münch. Preface to "Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum."

of the monks. They had a rapid sale throughout Europe. Hutten published other works. Having pointed his shafts during a visit to Rome, he directed them against her from the Court of the Archbishop of Mainz. Compelled by this publication to depart from his present home, he repaired to the Court of the Emperor Charles V.; but on finding that the Pope had directed the latter to seize him, and send him to Rome, he took refuge in the castle of Ebernburg, where Francis of Sickingen offered a home to all who had provoked the vengeance of the Head of the Church. Here he composed those remarkable works, the perusal of which had the effect of confirming all orders of the people in their determination to break the bonds of Rome, and to contend earnestly for the blessings of liberty and independence. Sickingen has been described as the mirror of chivalry. He was judged worthy by his contemporaries even to wear the imperial crown. He was the last of that race of knights whose swords were ever starting from their scabbards to smite asunder the chains of the oppressor. But unlike his mail-clad ancestors, he was a votary of the Muses. Even amid the din of warfare, he would find time to devote himself to the peaceful pursuits of literature and science.

Hutten, during his residence in Ebernburg, instructed him in those truths which it was the object of Luther to propagate through Europe. He now determined to promote in his own way the cause of the Reformation; to aid Hutten, by force of arms, in the realization of a vision of a golden age, continually floating before him, of which he had originally intended Charles V. to be the hero; to make Germany, like Judæa of old, the centre from which a Christian constitution and a Christian spirit were to go forth through the length and breadth of the habitable world. In the prosecution of this object, he made an unsuccessful attack on the Archbishop of Treves and other potentates. In the follow-

ing spring, he was besieged by them in his castle of Landstein. The modern artillery soon battered down the time-worn walls and the venerable towers of a feudal structure, round which its echoes had never before rolled. Chivalry, in its death-pangs, fought its last battle in defence of the Reformation. Sickingen was mortally wounded, and the bodies of his feudal retainers were buried beneath the ruins of the castle.

Hutten, finding that all his hopes of moral and political regeneration, according to his own ideas, were buried in the grave of his heroic friend, determined to withdraw, for a time at least, from the world's high stage. Sick in body, and sick in soul, an outlaw, under the ban of the Pope and the Empire, he arrived at Basle, where he immediately sought an interview with Erasmus. He had written in a tone of banter to him in 1520, had treated him as an apostate, and had endeavoured to induce him to stand in the front of the battle with the Church of Rome.* No two natures could be conceived to be more opposed to each other than those of Erasmus and Hutten. The one was bold, rough, and disputatious, ready to strike down every one who stood in his path, ready to do and dare anything to advance the cause of the Reformation; the other was timid and irresolute, a man of polished and gentle manners, who was ready to sacrifice everything rather than lose his place in the good opinion of the world, and who had a religious horror of controversy. He says of himself that, by a kind of natural instinct, he "so abhorred all sorts of quarrels, that, if he had a large estate to defend at law, he would sooner lose it than litigate it."† As their principles of action were thus totally different, it could not be supposed that they could be friends. We need not be

* Dr. Strauss's *Life of Hutten*.

† Jortin's "*Life*," vol. i. p. 315.

surprised, therefore, to hear that Erasmus determined if possible not to see him, and that he sent a young man named Eppendorf with a message to the effect that he would rather not do so. The truth was, that as Hutten had made himself obnoxious to the Pope and the ruling powers, he was, with his usual timidity, afraid that he should compromise himself with them, if he held the least intercourse with him.

On hearing a few days afterwards from Eppendorf that Hutten was not offended at his refusal, but wished, as he thought, to have some conversation with him, Erasmus told him to say that he would call on him if he could only bear the heat of his stove ; but that if Hutten could bear the cold of his room, he would see him at his own house, and was ready to talk to him till he was tired. Eppendorf proved a false friend. He never delivered this message, and did his best to exasperate Hutten against Erasmus. During his stay they never met. After a short time he was requested by the magistracy of Basle to leave the city.

Hutten withdrew, meditating a horrible revenge. His anger was increased by the publication of a letter soon afterwards from Erasmus, which, as he did not know what had passed between him and Eppendorf, appeared to him to give an incorrect account of the circumstances connected with the proposed interview, and which led him to the conclusion that he intended to abandon the cause of the Reformation. The friends of Erasmus, hearing that Hutten intended to publish a book against him, endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose ; and Erasmus himself wrote a letter to him, stating his reasons for declining to see him. But Hutten would not listen to persuasion. A violent book soon issued from the press, in which he brought many charges against him, the most serious of which were that he had

ceased to advocate the Reformation, and that he had been guilty of a base subserviency to the Court of Rome. He expressed his belief that, in taking this course, he had been influenced by the love of fame, by bribes, and by the fear of persecution.

Erasmus soon answered him in a tract called “Spongia,” which he wrote in six days, full of bitter invective and terrible satire, designed to wipe off the splashes which he had received from him.* I wish that we could forget that he had published a work, in which, by reviling him, he has shown a disregard of one of the plainest precepts of the Gospel. Having disposed of the minor charges against himself, and having given his own version of his reasons for declining to see him, he vindicated himself from the most serious, that he had abandoned the cause of the Reformation. He stated that he had never pledged himself to accept what Luther had written, or would write hereafter; that he had never, as Hutten asserted, given up all his other studies to attack him; that he had never approved of the tyranny, rapacity, and vices of the Court of Rome; that he had strongly condemned the sale of indulgences; that his opinion about ecclesiastics was evident from many passages in his works; that it was utterly untrue that he was preparing to join the victorious party; and that he only wanted leisure to do good according to his opportunities and abilities. He also gave his own view of the Papal Supremacy, to which I have already called the attention of my readers; and vindicated himself from the charge of cowardice, saying that he had no mind to die for Luther’s paradoxes, and using other words, on which I shall have observations to make in a future chapter. We find also, in this work, a defence of himself from the charge of vanity, saying that if it had been true, he would have

* Op. tom. x. p. 1631, edit. Lugd.

accepted the splendid offers which had been made to him. That this defence was insufficient, will appear plainly hereafter. He concluded with saying that he regretted this controversy, because he was anxious to turn away his thoughts from the tumult and contentions of earth, and to prepare for the strict and solemn account which he should have to render when he stood before the Judgment-Seat of Christ.

Hutten never saw this work. Soon afterwards, the career of one of the greatest geniuses of modern times, who had fought resolutely against superstition, but often not in a Christian spirit, nor with weapons drawn from the armoury of heaven, came to a termination. Hutten died unnoticed at the end of August, 1523, and was buried in an obscure grave in the island of Ufnau on the lake of Zurich. Erasmus was blamed for having published his "*Spongia*" after Hutten's death; but the truth is that he was not aware of it for two months after its publication. I wish that I could acquit him of the meanness of having made a violent attack upon Hutten on account of his vices, shortly after his death, in a letter which he knew would be read everywhere, while he took credit to himself for not having done so in his "*Spongia*." The conduct and treatise of Hutten were certainly very reprehensible. When we think of the last days of his life, we cannot fail to regret that he should have cast a shadow over them by assisting in widening, through this unseemly attack on Erasmus, the breach between him and the Reformers.

Luther was very much grieved at the treatment which Erasmus had received from Hutten. He saw that he and other violent men of his party were doing their utmost to alienate him from the Reformation. He was convinced that they wanted to compel him to do a work to which he was altogether unequal. We quite subscribe to his opinion on

that matter. It would have been better if no attempt had been made to drag forth Erasmus as a gladiator into the theological arena. He was not qualified to do the rough work of the Reformation. When Luther's work had begun, the work of Erasmus may be said to have come to an end. He was, as we have seen, a good pioneer. "Erasmus," said Luther, "is admirable in pointing out errors, but he knows not how to teach the truth." The reason assigned for the persistent efforts made to enlist his energies in the cause of the Reformers was the apprehension that he would be induced by the urgent entreaties of the Romanists, which I shall describe presently, to come forward and write a powerful work in defence of their dogmas. Perhaps that fear was natural. But still, as we shall see presently, the language addressed to him caused the very evil which it was designed to prevent, and was the means of driving him into the camp of their opponents. If Erasmus had been allowed to remain in a position of dignified repose, and had never mingled in the fray, in all probability his peace of mind would not have been interrupted; he would not have receded in his later days from the ground which he occupied in the early part of his life; and his name would have descended with scarcely a stain upon it to succeeding generations.

The following letter of Luther to him, written in April, 1524, fully expresses these views and apprehensions.* It seems to me far too full of contemptuous and irritating expressions; and in some respects Erasmus' answer contrasts well with it. He begins in the Apostolical manner. "Grace and peace to you from the Lord Jesus."

"I shall not complain of you," he says, "for having behaved yourself as a man estranged from us, to keep fair

* This is mainly Milner's version a little altered. Milner's "Church History," vol. v. p. 584.

with the Papists, my enemies. Nor was I much offended, that in your printed books, to gain their favour, or to soften their rage, you censured us with too much acrimony. We saw that the Lord had not given you the discernment, the courage, and the resolution to join with us, and freely and confidently to oppose those monsters ; and, therefore, we would not exact from you that which surpasses your strength and capacity. We have even borne with your weakness, and honoured that portion of the gift of God which is in you ; for the whole world must own with gratitude, that through you letters reign and flourish, and that we are enabled to read the Sacred Scriptures in their originals. I never wished that, forsaking or neglecting your own proper talents, you should enter into our camp. You might indeed have aided us not a little by your wit and eloquence ; but since you have not the disposition and the courage for it, it is safer for you to serve the Lord in your own way. Only we feared lest our adversaries should entice you to write against us, and necessity should constrain us to oppose you to your face. We have held back some persons amongst us, who were disposed and prepared to attack you ; and I could have wished that the complaint of Hutten had never been published, and still more that your "Spongia," in answer to it, had never come forth ; by which, you may at present, if I mistake not, see and feel how easy it is to say fine things about the duty of modesty and moderation, and to accuse Luther of wanting them ; and how difficult, and even impossible, it is to be really modest and moderate without a special gift of the Holy Ghost. Believe me, or believe me not, Jesus Christ is my witness, that I am concerned as well as you, that the resentment and hatred of so many eminent persons have been excited against you. I must suppose that this is a matter which gives you no small uneasiness ; for this is a trial too great for mere human

virtue like your own. To speak freely, there are persons amongst us who have this weakness about them, that they cannot bear, as they ought, your bitterness and dissimulation, which you want to pass off for prudence and modesty. They have cause for resentment; and yet would not be offended if they possessed greater magnanimity. Hitherto, though you have provoked me, I have restrained myself; and I promised my friends, in letters which you have seen, that I would continue to do so, unless you should come forward openly against us. For although you think not with us, and many pious doctrines are condemned by you, through irreligion or dissimulation, or treated in a sceptical manner, yet I neither can nor will ascribe a stubborn perverseness to you. What can I do now? Things are exasperated on both sides; and I could wish, if I might be allowed to act the part of a mediator, that they would cease to assail you with so much animosity, and suffer your old age to rest in peace in the Lord; and thus they would conduct themselves, in my opinion, if they either considered your weakness, or the magnitude of the controverted cause, which has long been beyond your capacity. They should be the more inclined to show moderation to you, because our affairs are so far advanced that our cause is in no danger, although even Erasmus should attack it with all his might, with all his acute points and strictures. On the other hand, my dear Erasmus, if you duly reflect on your own weakness, you will abstain from those sharp and spiteful figures of rhetoric; and if you cannot, or will not, defend our sentiments, you will let them alone, and treat of subjects which are better suited to you. Our friends, even you yourself must own, have some reason to be out of humour at being lashed by you, because human infirmity thinks of the authority and reputation of Erasmus. Indeed, there is much difference between him and the rest of the

Papists. He alone is a more formidable adversary than all of them joined together.

“My prayer is that the Lord may give you a spirit worthy of your great reputation ; but if this be not granted, I intreat you, if you cannot help, to remain, at least, a spectator of our severe conflict, and not to join our adversaries ; and, in particular, not to write tracts against us ; on which condition I will not publish against you.”

Erasmus sent the following brief answer to Luther : “I fear that Satan may delude you ; at least I doubt the truth of your doctrines ; and I would never profess what I do not believe, much less what I have not attained. Besides, I dread the ruin of literature. I have only endeavoured to remove the idea that there is a perfect understanding between you and me, and that all your doctrines are to be found in my books. Whatever you may write against me gives me no great concern. Perhaps Erasmus, by writing against you, may do more good to the cause of the Gospel than some foolish scribblers of your own party, who will not suffer a man to be a quiet spectator of these contentions—the tragical issue of which I dread.”*

During this time every effort had been exerted to induce Erasmus to oppose the Reformers. All, to a man, fixed their eyes upon him, as the only person at all qualified to retrieve the fallen fortunes of Romanism. Popes, cardinals, prelates, kings, princes, united in doing homage to his genius. They used every argument, and every entreaty ; they flattered him ; they addressed themselves to his pride, to his ambition, and to his timidity ; hoping to induce him to lend them the aid of his powerful arm in the conflict with their foes. Pope Adrian, of Utrecht, his old school-fellow at Deventer, who was elected Pope after the death of

* Op. tom. iii. p. 926, edit. Lugd.

Leo, in 1522, wrote to him two memorable letters, in one of which he intreated him, "out of regard to his reputation, to take up his pen against these novel heresies," telling him that "God had bestowed on him a great genius, and a happy turn for writing, and that it was his duty to use his gifts in defence of the Church."*

Henry VIII. also strongly urged him to take the field against Luther. George of Saxony exhorted him to attack Luther openly; or, as he said, there would be a general outcry against him, as one who had neglected his duty, and cared neither for the dignity of the Church nor the purity of the Gospel.† Tonstall, the bigoted Bishop of London, thus wrote to him: "By the sufferings and blood of Christ, by the glory which you hope for in heaven, I exhort and conjure you, Erasmus, nay, the Church intreats and conjures you, to encounter this many-headed monster."‡ Erasmus for a long time withstood these repeated solicitations. He did, indeed, in compliance with one request of Adrian, send to him the secret advice for the restoration of peace in the Church, which he had promised in a previous letter.§ He recommended that "some concessions should be made; that the causes of the evils should be investigated; that the licentiousness of the press should be restrained; that to settle these points, there should be called together, from different nations, men of integrity and ability, whose opinion"—leaving off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, as if he were afraid that he was offering to Adrian and his Court unacceptable advice. This fear proved to have been well-founded, for the Pope expressed his displeasure at it, and his enemies at Rome, in consequence of it, laboured for his ruin. But he still turned a deaf ear to Adrian's second request, that he would write

* Op. tom. iii. p. 735, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 800.

‡ Ibid. p. 771.

§ Ibid. p. 580, edit. Bas.

against Luther, and was proof against the flattery, the exhortations, and the remonstrances addressed to him by others. Probably all those reasons for declining the contest weighed with him, which have been already mentioned. Yet he had motives for plunging into the thick of the battle. His self-love, his besetting sin, had been wounded. People began to say that he was unequal to the conflict with this mighty giant. A monk now occupied that throne to which he himself had been raised by the unanimous consent of Christendom. He would have to hide his diminished head behind the broad effulgence of this newly risen luminary. He was desirous of establishing his superiority to Luther. Probably, if he had not before made up his mind to oppose him, Luther's letter at length induced him to do so. Then the cup of his indignation was full to the very brim. He gave a promise that he would declare himself in a public manner against the Reformation. He determined to unsheathe his sword, and to endeavour to stay the triumphant march of his adversary.

Erasmus, however, was so embarrassed by his past career, that he found it very difficult to come forward as the champion of Romanism. This had been another reason, hitherto, for declining to write against the Reformers. He had condemned, in the strongest terms, the corruptions of the Church of Rome, and many of her doctrines. He could not conscientiously aid the Pope in riveting on the limbs of the inhabitants of Europe those manacles from which he had laboured to deliver them. Accordingly he avoided those questions of indulgences, the invocation of the Saints, pilgrimages, and purgatory, on which he had formerly expressed a decided opinion, and wrote an elaborate treatise called "Diatribē," on the great question of free-will, on which he really differed from Luther.* Of this work he was

* De libero arbitrio *Διατριβή*. Op. tom. ix. p. 997, edit. Bas.

thinking in 1523, for he wrote to King Henry VIII. in the September of that year, "I am meditating something against the novel doctrines, but I dare not publish it before I leave Germany, lest I should fall a victim before I appear in the contest ;"* but he did not publish it till the autumn of 1524. He sent a part of it to Henry VIII. for his approbation. He sent copies also to Wolsey, Warham, and others.

This is one of those great questions on which the mind, "in wandering mazes lost," often finds no rest for the sole of its weary feet. The object of Erasmus was to show that a man can either apply himself to those things which concern his salvation, or turn away from them. But he makes statements which are inconsistent with this view of the matter. He pronounces as "moderately probable," the opinion that "a man can neither begin, nor carry on, nor finish anything without Divine grace ;" and again he says, "that there is no denying that the Divine operation must concur in the production of every action, and for this reason, because every action implies a real existence of something, and even of something good." He does not express his thoughts plainly. He states in fact one thing, and proves another. The doctrine of Luther, which Erasmus condemned, is well stated in the Tenth Article of the Church of England, "Of Free-will." "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God : Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will."

His letters, written at this time, show that he published

* Op. tom. iii. p. 773, edit. Lugd.

the "Diatribes on the Freedom of the Will," very unwillingly. He thought, too, that he should not satisfy many members of the Roman Catholic Church. Of his unfitness for the work which he had imposed upon himself, he was well aware, for he said in a letter to Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, "I know that, in writing on free-will, I was not in my proper sphere."* And in another letter to a friend, he goes on to say: "But to confess the truth, we have lost free-will. There my mind dictated one thing, and my pen wrote another."† These words are expressed incautiously, and are to be understood, not as a proof of his insincerity, but as intimating, as Jortin has observed, "that he had written, not against his conscience, but against his inclination, and so had lost his *free-will*: for first he has declared this a hundred times over; and secondly he certainly picked out a subject on which he really differed from Luther, and could write against him *ex animo*. Any man of common discernment, who peruses his treatises on this subject, will see that he writes as he believed. His acquaintance also with the ancient Greek fathers, and his professed respect for them, could not fail to make him a sort of Semipelagian."‡ We may argue also that his heart could not have been engaged on this momentous question, or else we should discover more life and warmth in his treatise. We may add, too, that he would not, in this case, have bestowed more attention than usual on the polish of the style, the elegance of the Latinity, and the balancing of the periods, while writing on one of the most important subjects which can occupy the attention of a rational and immortal being.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 815, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 985.

‡ Jortin's "Life," vol. i. p. 415. For proofs that Erasmus wrote very sincerely yet unwillingly, see quotations from letters to friends in Milner's "Church Hist.," vol. v. p. 308.

Luther was so much occupied that he did not immediately reply to the "Diatribē." This silence was construed by the monks and scholastic divines into an admission that the arguments of Erasmus were unanswerable. "They asked," wrote Luther, "with an air of insult, 'What, has this Maccabæus, this sturdy dogmatist, at last found an antagonist against whom he dares not open his mouth?'"*

Erasmus, during this time, was suffering tortures. He had indeed abstained, in his treatise, from all malice against Luther, hoping that he should disarm his hostility. But still he trembled when he thought of the formidable enemy whom he had provoked. "The die has been cast," he wrote to Henry VIII., "the book on the freedom of the will has appeared. . . . Believe me, it is a bold deed, if the situation of Germany be considered. I expect to be stoned for it."† Before long he bitterly repented of what he had done. "Why should I not have been permitted," he exclaimed, "to wear out my old age in the garden of the Muses? Here have I, an old man of sixty, been violently pushed into the arena, and instead of the lyre, obliged to hold the cestus and the net!"‡

At length, towards the end of 1525, Luther's celebrated treatise, "De Servo Arbitrio," in reply to Erasmus, made its appearance. It was received at once with great eagerness, and had an extraordinary sale. The booksellers of Wittenberg, Augsburg, and Nuremberg, endeavoured to surpass one another in the rapidity with which they printed their numerous editions. I have space only to glance at one or two statements of doctrine in it which may serve to

* Luther's letter to Erasmus, prefixed to his "Treatise de Servo Arbitrio." Milner's "Church History," vol. v. p. 272.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 816, edit. Lugd.

‡ Ibid. p. 834. He alludes to the net which the Roman gladiators tried to throw over their antagonists.

give a general idea of the manner in which he conducted his argument. He says in the letter already referred to, "I feel most indignant to see such contemptible materials conveyed in the most precious and ornamental pieces of eloquence. They are like the sweepings of a stable placed in golden dishes." Erasmus had asserted that words like these "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," implied the ability of man in his own natural strength to do the will of God. Luther, however, asserted that the passages referred to show him what he ought to do, and his inability to do it, but do not inform him of the existence of the power attributed to him; that when the Word of God says "Choose," it assumes the assistance of that grace by which alone men can be enabled to do what God commands; that as, when our Lord summoned Lazarus to come forth, He gave him the power to burst the bands of death, so when God gives a command to the bond-slaves of sin and Satan to cast away their fetters, He accompanies it with the will and the power to come forth from their prison-house into "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." Luther considered his own an essential and fundamental doctrine, for he closes his book with the following words: "You and only you have seen the true hinge upon which all turned, and have aimed your blow at the throat. On this account I can sincerely thank you." He felt that it was connected with his doctrine of justification by faith; for he says, "Erasmus owns that he defends free-will that he may obtain some place for merits; and he is perpetually saying, that where there is no liberty there can be no merit; and where there is no merit, there is no room for reward. But St. Paul represents justification as a perfectly free gift, without any consideration of merit. . . . Now the advocates of free-will have no other method of answering the question, Why does God justify one man and

not another? than by having recourse to the different use which they suppose men to make of their free-will ; namely, that in the one case there are exertions, in the other no exertions ; and that God approves of one man on account of his exertions, but punishes the other for the neglect of them. . . . Thus our gracious God is described as a respecter of works, of merits, and of persons." These, then, are the views which Luther entertained on the great question of free-will. We find him presenting them in a nervous style, and a tone, forming a contrast to the hesitating utterance of Erasmus, which showed that he considered himself to have a firm grasp on the truth, and with a deep conviction that *his* was the right system to be propounded to the nations, and that they must be taught to pray that "God would send them help from the sanctuary, and strengthen them out of Zion," before they could cast off the ceremonial formalism and superstition of ages, and obtain the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

Erasmus had no sooner read Luther's treatise than he published a very angry reply to it called "Hyperaspistes."* In the advertisement to the first part he informs us that, through the management of the Lutherans, he was allowed only ten days for the composition of it. Luther had in his treatise paid a high tribute to the genius of his adversary. Erasmus was, however, so enraged with him that he represents it in his reply as the honey of a poisoned cup, or as the sting accompanying the embrace of the serpent. He gave another proof of the excessive irritation of his mind against him : he wrote a letter to John, the new Elector of Saxony, in which he asks that Luther may be punished for charging him with holding epicurean or atheistical opinions. Soon afterwards he published a second book of the "Hyper-

* Part i. Op. tom. ix. p. 1026, and part ii. Op. tom. ix. p. 1097, edit. Bas.

aspistes," because, as he informs us in it, the moderation of the "Diatribes" was considered by some as indicating a collusion with Luther. They said that he had spared his adversary. People were not wanting, he observed, who spoke of a collusion, even after the publication of the first part of the "Hyperaspistes." This book is more elaborate than the other; it is also long and wearisome. The attentive reader will often find great difficulty in ascertaining his exact meaning, and will not be able to come to a distinct or satisfactory conclusion. It is full of invectives. He accuses his adversary repeatedly of barbarity, impudence, lying, and blasphemy. He ventures on a prediction. "Luther promises himself a wonderful reputation with posterity, whereas I am rather inclined to prophesy that no name under the sun will be held in greater execration than Luther's." . . .

It is painful to find these two great men bringing against each other these railing accusations, and showing an utter disregard of one of the plainest precepts of Christianity. Luther, as his warmest admirers admit, was, throughout his illustrious career, often betrayed into the use of violent language. He had indeed told Melancthon that he should be very moderate in his reply; but he forgot his promise, and did not attempt to restrain his impetuosity. It is right, however, to add, that he wrote to Erasmus afterwards a conciliatory letter, in which he expressed his deep sorrow for the infirmity of a violent temper. Erasmus, who had hitherto been remarkable for his mildness, now lost that moderation and patience which had hitherto been the secret of his strength in his conflicts. The treatise on the bondage of the will was the cause of more open hostilities with the Lutherans, and quite precluded the possibility of a reconciliation between the contending parties.

This controversy was to the end of his days a source of much vexation to Erasmus. No circumstance, however, in con-

nection with it was more disappointing to him than the avowed judgment of Melancthon. He knew him at the time of the publication of the "*Novum Instrumentum*," for he mentions him with honour in it. Melancthon was so delighted with this work that he offered him a tribute of admiration in Greek verse, dated August 21, 1516, which was sent to him by Beatus Rhenanus.* He seemed at this time likely to ruin his health by hard work at the University of Tübingen. A correspondent introduces him as worthy of the love of "Erasmus the first," because he was likely to prove "Erasmus the second."† These two distinguished men often corresponded, and were on very good terms with each other. Melancthon spoke of Erasmus as "the first to call back theology to her fountain-head," and as "freer than Luther, because he had the assistance of real and sacred learning;"‡ and Erasmus on the other hand expressed, in 1518, a hope that he might long survive himself, predicting that if he did so, his name would cast the name of Erasmus into the shade.§ Thus, then, we see that he would attach very great importance to an opinion expressed by Melancthon on this controversy, especially as he, along with the rest of the world, had the highest opinion of his talents, learning, and moderation. He wrote to him soon after the publication of the "*Diatribē*." "If Wittenberg," he said, "had not been so far off, I would have gone there for a few days on purpose to communicate with you and Luther.|| I have read all your commonplaces, and I both admire and love more

* Seebohm's "*Oxford Reformers*," p. 401.

† *Œcolampadius Erasmo*, tom. iii. p. 235, edit. Lugd.

‡ Seebohm, p. 478.

§ *Eras. Œcolampadio*, tom. iii. p. 367, edit. Lugd.

|| Jortin says, that his whole conduct shows that he had no thoughts of paying such a visit, and that these were merely compliments to pacify Melancthon and Luther.—Vol. i. p. 340.

and more your candid and happy genius.”* What a disappointment it must have been to Erasmus, when he called to mind the high opinion of him which Melancthon once entertained, to receive a few weeks afterwards a letter in which he told him that he could not with a safe conscience condemn Luther’s sentiments ; and to find him saying, “ We are not at all shocked at your dissertation on free-will, for it would be mere tyranny to hinder any man from giving his opinion in the Church of Christ on any points of religion.”†

But this was not his only vexation in connection with this matter. We find that he gave offence to both parties, and greatly disappointed all the learned in Europe. His greatest admirers allowed that his “*Diatribē*” was a feeble production. Many of the Lutherans were much exasperated, and none were convinced by his treatise. The Papists revenged themselves for the failure of their champion by the violence with which they attacked his former works.

Erasmus had now been residing for some time at Basle. He came to it from Louvain in November, 1521. His great inducement to do so was that he might be near Froben’s printing press. Soon after his arrival he seems to have suffered greatly from the stone. The wonder is, when we consider the excruciating nature of these sufferings to which he often refers, that he should have been able to apply himself with so much ardour to the prosecution of his studies. Notwithstanding the opposition of the monks, he had found Louvain, for some time, a very agreeable place of residence. The climate was healthy, and the situation delightful. Another inducement to reside in it was that it was in the dominions of the Emperor. If he departed from them he feared that he should lose his pension. He liked Louvain

* Op. tom. iii. p. 830, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 820.

also because he found at it many attached friends. But they at length became changed and distant, because they were afraid that he was inflicting injury on the Church. The Lutherans in the city also followed him with bitter hostility. He was afraid, too, that the Emperor, if he continued in his dominions, would compel him to write against Luther. For these reasons he had determined to take his departure from Louvain.

Among the residents at Basle in 1524 was a young French Reformer named William Farel, who had sought refuge in that city from the storm of persecution in France. Farel constantly evinced his contempt for Erasmus, because he did not show that boldness and decision of character for which he thought that every faithful follower of the Saviour ought to be distinguished. Erasmus was very angry because a young unknown Frenchman from Dauphiny dared to revile him, and to withhold from him that homage which had been willingly paid to him even by the highest and mightiest of this world's potentates. Farel said that he was convinced that Erasmus had not received into his heart the truths of the Gospel, and was provoked to see him, from fear of the consequences, closing the door of his house against the Reformers. Being anxious to lessen his influence, because he was afraid that others would be led by the example of this eminent man to exhibit the same failings for which he had unhappily rendered himself conspicuous, he openly asserted that Erasmus wished to extinguish the light of the Gospel, and said that Froben's wife knew more divinity than he. In using this language he showed himself much wanting in the meekness of the Gospel. Erasmus lost no opportunity of giving vent to his anger. He attacked also all the other French refugees at Basle. "What," he wrote to Melancthon, "shall we shake off the dominion of Popes and Prelates, only to submit to worse tyrants, to scabby madmen,

to the scum of the earth? . . . for such France has lately sent to us.”* Instead of Farel, he often called him Fallicus, or deceitful; and says further of him in a letter to A. Brugnarius, “The Lutherans themselves cannot bear that fellow; he has been reprimanded several times by Ecolampadius and Pelican, but to no purpose.”†

He became perfectly furious when he heard that Farel had called him Balaam. Turning suddenly to him one day in the presence of others, who were discussing some points of Christian doctrine, he asked why he had given him that name? Farel, taken by surprise, hesitated for a moment, but soon recovering himself told him that it was not he who had called him so, but Du Blet, a merchant of Lyons, a refugee like himself, at Basle. “Rather,” said Erasmus, “he learnt it from you.” Then, ashamed of himself for having shown anger, he changed the conversation, and said to him, “Why do you not hold the doctrine of the Invocation of the Saints? I suppose because you do not find it in Scripture?” Farel assented. “Show me then,” he said, “from Scripture, that we ought to invoke the Holy Ghost.” Farel replied, “If he be God, we ought to pray to him.” Farel, being pressed by Erasmus to give a passage from Scripture, while he told him often at the same time that he agreed with him on that point, and that he only did so for the sake of argument, cited that from St. John’s first Epistle—“and these Three are One.” “I answered,” says Erasmus, “that the words, ‘the *Father*, the *Word*, and the *Holy Ghost*,’ are in no ancient manuscript, and have never been cited by those Fathers who have disputed most against the Arians, as Athanasius, Cyril, and Hilary.” “I left the discussion,” he continued, “because night was coming on. He could not prove that the Holy Ghost is God, a truth which may be

* Op. tom. iii. p. 820, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 822.

proved from St. Paul ; and if he had done so, he would not have vanquished me in argument ; for it is no opinion of mine, that the Saints ought to be invoked.”*

Farel does not appear to advantage in this matter. He was one of those whose disregard of the plainest precepts of Christianity helped to alienate Erasmus from the Reformation. We must observe, too, that Erasmus, while attacking the Reformers, chose to forget that many of his friends among the Romanists were the slaves of every vice. I have given the particulars connected with Farel, because I am bound to record the painful fact that Erasmus so far forgot the example of Him, who, “when He was reviled reviled not again, when He suffered threatened not,” as constantly to pour forth the venom of his heart in the language of abuse, during the last sad years of his memorable career, and to censure the morals of the Lutherans, as if the party were to be blamed for the errors of a few.

I shall now give an extract from a letter of Erasmus to his friend, Warham, which will be of service in the delineation of his character. Like that beautiful passage in Macbeth,

‘ This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air
Nimble and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his lov’d mansionry, that the heaven’s breath
Smells wooingly here ;”

introduced just as the clouds are becoming darker and more threatening, so this extract may be a relief to the mind, wearied by the contemplation of the gloomy picture which has just been presented to the view. Erasmus tells his patron that he had sent to him the second edition of the epistles of St. Jerome, wet from the press, so

* Erasmus, in the same letter to A. Brugnarius, says that Farel had given a different account of what had taken place.

that he could not bind them, containing the dedication to him, dated July, 1524. He adds that he had twice received twenty pounds; thanks the Archbishop for having augmented his pension: and exclaims, "Cursed be these wars which decimate us so often! I thought, however, that pensions did not pay such taxes."

The Archbishop had also sent him a horse, which Erasmus thus describes to him. "I have received your horse, who is not very handsome, but a good creature; for he is free from all mortal sins, except gluttony and laziness; and he is endowed with the qualities of a holy father confessor, being prudent, modest, humble, chaste, and peaceable, and one who neither bites nor kicks. I fancy that by the knavery or mistake of your domestics, I have not the horse intended for me. I had ordered my servant not to ask for a horse, nor to accept one, unless some person offered to him a very good one, of his own accord. And yet I am equally obliged to you for your kind intention. Indeed I thought to sell my horses, as I have given up riding."*

Thus we see that he never lost his sportive humour. Like a flash of light illumining the gloom, it breaks out amid the clouds which had gathered thickly around him.

Erasmus discovered matter for pleasantry not only in the gayest but also in the gravest subjects. The "Colloquies," begun in 1519, when the first edition, a short work, was published, and followed by other editions much increased in size, till 1530, illustrate the truth of this assertion. The edition of 1522, much enlarged, was dedicated to J. Erasmus Froben, his god-son, the son of Froben, the printer. He composed this work partly that young persons might have a book to teach them the Latin language, and religious and moral sentiments, and partly to cure the world, if possible, of the abuses and superstitious devotion of which the monks were the authors

* Op. tom. iii. p. 730, edit. Bas.

and abettors. He is not so well known to the public by any of his works as by his "Colloquies." They abound in wit and taste, biting satire and elegant criticism, and contain very good descriptions of life and manners. The speakers are brought so distinctly before us that we seem to hear the conversation carried on between them. We see the seriousness of some of them, the wit of others, and the good humour of all of them. The "Colloquies" are written in very elegant Latin, and contain the happiest allusions to passages in the best classical authors.

Scarcely had the "Colloquies" made their appearance, when a loud outcry was raised against them. Erasmus was accused of laughing at indulgences, of slighting auricular confession, of deriding the eating of fish on fast days, and other superstitions of a similar description. The Faculty of Theology at Paris passed a censure on the "Colloquies," in 1526, as a work in which "the fasts and abstinences of the Church are slighted, the sufferings of the Holy Virgin and the Saints are ridiculed, Virginity is set below Matrimony, Christians are discouraged from Monkery, and grammatical is preferred to theological erudition. The perusal of this wicked book is therefore forbidden to all, especially to the young, and it is decreed that it be entirely suppressed, if possible." It was also condemned by the Inquisition, and the reading of it was prohibited.

I have already referred to the extraordinary sale of this work, and have also given extracts from it, illustrative of the manner in which it aided the Reformation. There can be no doubt that coming as a school-book into the hands of the rising generation, it prepared them, at the most important time of life, for casting from them the shackles of superstition which had long held their forefathers in bondage. The best passages and the liveliest strokes of wit are directed against the Monks. The "Seraphic Obsequies" is

the finest of the "Colloquies," and the most exquisite in its satire. It contains an exposure of the history of the Order. The following is an extract from it.* The persons who converse are Theotimus and Philecous. The first name is derived from Greek words, signifying a worshipper of God, and the second from words denoting one who is desirous of hearing, an examiner of reports.

Phil.—What is the cause, Theotimus, of this unwonted gravity of demeanour?

Theo.—I am returning from the funeral of an angel.

Phil.—What do I hear? Do even the angels die?

Theo.—No, but their fellows die. Not, however, to keep you any longer in suspense, you know, I think, Eusebius of Pelusium, a distinguished and learned man.†

Phil.—What, do you mean him who, after he had been a prince, became a private man, then an exile, then a little better than a beggar; I had almost said something worse.

Theo.—You have guessed the person to whom I refer.

Phil.—But what has happened to him?

Theo.—He was buried to-day. I am returning from the funeral.

Phil.—*That* must have been a sad ceremony which has made you so sad.

Theo.—I am afraid that I shall not be able to describe to you what I saw without tears.

Phil.—I am afraid that I shall not be able to hear it without laughing. But go on with what you have to say.

Theo.—You know that Eusebius has long been in bad health. His physicians told him that they had done all they could for him; that God indeed could do what they

* Op. tom. i. p. 737, edit. Bas.

† The Prince of Carpi, one of the opponents of Erasmus, to whom reference will afterwards be made, is the person here referred to. He died at Paris, and was carried to his grave in the Franciscan robe.

could not do ; but that, as far as they could tell, he could not live for more than three days.

Phil.—What happened then ?

Theo.—Immediately that distinguished man put upon his feeble body the robe of the most holy Francis, had his head shaven, put on the ash-coloured cowl, and a robe of the same colour, took the knotted girdle, and placed on his feet the shoes which have glass in them.

Phil.—What ? when he was about to die ?

Theo.—Yes ; nay more : he declared with his dying voice, that he would fight for Christ according to the rule of St. Francis, if contrary to the expectation of the physicians he should recover. Men remarkable for their sanctity were witnesses to this declaration. This excellent individual died in this robe at the time foretold by the physicians. Several members of the fraternity came to the house to assist at his funeral solemnity.

Phil.—I wish that I had been present at that spectacle.

Theo.—You would have shed tears if you had seen the affection with which the Seraphic brothers washed the corpse, fitted on that holy robe, placed his hands in the form of a cross, laid the feet bare, and kissed them when they had done so, and anointed his face with ointment according to the direction in the Gospels. Afterwards they placed the body on the bier ; and, according to the precept of St. Paul, " Bear ye one another's burdens,"* the brethren bore their brother on their own shoulders along the road to the monastery. Here they buried him with solemn dirges. As that funeral procession was passing, I saw several unable to refrain from tears, on seeing a man whom they had before seen clothed in purple and fine linen, now wearing the robe of the Franciscan, with the girdle around

* Galat. vi. 2.

him, and having his body placed out in a manner calculated to excite religious feelings. For the head of the dead man was turned towards his shoulder, and the hands, as I have said, were placed crosswise. This was a truly religious spectacle. Nay, the Seraphic brethren themselves, with their bent heads, with their downcast looks, and with their dirges so mournful that I do not think that the shades below could chant more mournfully, drew tears and sobs from many of the spectators.

Phil.—Had he the five wounds of St. Francis?

Theo.—I cannot say for certain that he had them. Some livid marks were seen on his hands and feet; and his robe had on the left side a little hole in it. But I did not venture to look too closely, because it is said that in matters of this kind curiosity has been fatal to many.

Phil.—Did you see any one laughing?

Theo.—Yes; but I imagine that they were heretics, of whom the world is now full.

Phil.—To tell you the truth, Theotimus, I should have had a difficulty in restraining my laughter, if I had been present at that spectacle.

Theo.—God grant that you may escape the contagion of their opinions!

Phil.—There is no danger, most excellent Theotimus. I have always from my early childhood had a religious veneration for St. Francis, a man, in the estimation of the world, neither learned nor wise, but very dear to God because he laboured to mortify his worldly affections. All who tread in his footsteps desire from the bottom of their heart to die to the world, and to live to Christ. But I would gladly learn from you what good the robe can do to a dead man.

Theo.—You know that God has told us not "to give that

which is holy unto the dogs, neither to cast our pearls before swine."* If, therefore, you ask the question, that you may find something to laugh at, you shall hear nothing from me; but if you have a sincere desire to learn, I will gladly tell you what the members of that order have told me.

Phil.—I assure you that I will be an attentive and docile pupil. . . .

The information asked for is given subsequently. Theophilus first lays bare the secrets of the Franciscans. The conversation is continued in the following manner:—

Phil.—What must we say of those who have the sacred robe put on them after their death? For they do not die in it.

Theo.—If they have been anxious to have it when they were alive, the will is taken for the deed.

Phil.—When I was at Antwerp, I was present with other relations at the death of a matron. In the room with us was a Franciscan, a very venerable man. When he saw her dying, he put one of her arms into the sleeve of his robe, so that it covered that arm and part of his shoulder. Then a doubt arose whether the whole of the woman was saved from hell, or only the part touched by the robe.

Theo.—The whole; just as in baptism, a part of the man is touched with the water, but the whole becomes Christian.

Phil.—No wonder that the evil spirits have so great a dread of that robe.

Theo.—They dread it more than the cross of our Lord. When Eusebius was being carried to his burial, I and many others saw crowds of black devils, like flies, jumping towards the body, but none of them dared to touch it.

Phil.—But in the meantime the face, the hands, and the feet were in danger because they were bare.

Theo.—As serpents cannot endure even the shade of the ash-tree, though it is stretched out to some distance, so the devils feel the poison of the sacred robe when they are far off from it.

Phil.—I suppose that these bodies do not putrefy ; otherwise worms would have more courage than evil spirits.

Theo.—You are probably right.

Phil.—How fortunate are the lice which always live in so holy a robe ! When, however, the robe is carried to the tomb, what is there to defend the soul ?

Theo.—The soul carries away with it the influence of that garment which renders it secure, so that it is said that no member of that order can go at all to purgatory.

Phil.—If you are right, I attach more importance to *that* revelation than to the Revelation of St. John ; for it shows a plain and easy way by which any one may, without trouble, difficulty, or penitence, escape eternal death, and pass his whole life in pleasure.

Theo.—I quite agree with you.

Phil.—I can, therefore, no longer be surprised that many think highly of the Seraphic fraternity ; but it is a wonder to me that there are some who are not afraid to oppose them.

Theo.—Doubtless you refer to those who are delivered over to a reprobate mind, and are blinded by their own wickedness.

Phil.—Hereafter I shall be more careful ; and I will endeavour to die in the sacred robe. . . .

The dialogue ends in the following manner :—

Phil.—These people, girt with a cord, and having half-shoes on their feet, swarm everywhere ; but there is scarcely one of them who follows the precept of our Lord, and the practice of the Apostles in aiming at perfection.

Theo.—I am well aware that wicked men tell everywhere

scandalous tales of them ; but I have this feeling towards them, that wherever I see that most holy robe, I believe myself to be in the presence of an angel of God. I think also that the house must be a happy one, the threshold of which is trodden by their feet.

Phil.—I trust that Francis will forgive me for having so long been in error. I thought that their robe was nothing else but a robe, and that it was not in itself better than the jacket of a sailor or the coat of a shoemaker, unless it were recommended by the sanctity of the wearer, just as the touch of the garment of Christ cured the issue of blood. I sometimes used to doubt whether the weaver or the tailor gave virtue to it.

Theo.—Undoubtedly, he who gives the form gives the virtue.

Phil.—I shall now live more happily. I shall not torment myself with the fear of hell, or worry myself about confession or doing penance.

I have given the above as a very good specimen of his wit and satirical powers. As I have already stated, this sportive raillery served greatly to lessen the influence which the monks exercised over the common herd of the people, and to cure the latter of their attachment to the superstitions of the Church of Rome. I cannot, however, altogether commend his use of this weapon. Very often his wit is ill-timed. Thus writing to Ammonius he says, "I am very angry with the heretics, because now when winter is coming, they have increased the price of fuel."* In fact, his wit often gained the mastery over him, and when he was aiming a blow at superstition, he inflicted a wound upon religion itself. I shall have occasion to refer again to this subject before I come to the conclusion of this work. But I may

* Op. tom. iii. p. 288, edit. Bas.

here observe that if infidels, instead of anxious inquirers after truth, had abounded in the following age, in all probability the engine which Erasmus employed to batter down the strongholds of superstition would have recoiled upon the defenders of the truth as it is in Jesus, and would have shaken to its foundation the rising fabric of Protestantism.

Among the "Colloquies" of Erasmus is one of a different kind, entitled the "Apotheosis of Capnio," the fanciful Græcized name of John Reuchlin. We cannot discover in it one word of raillery. Reuchlin was unquestionably the most learned man in Germany of his day. He was the son of a burgess of Pforzheim. When he was a boy he had, not only by his musical voice, but also by his winning manners, attracted the notice of the Margrave of Baden, and had been sent by him with his son to the University of Paris. There he made great progress under John Weissel in Greek and Hebrew literature. He was also led by him to see that Scripture condemns purgatory, human satisfaction for sins, absolution, and many other dogmas, the reception of which the Roman Catholic Church declares to be indispensable to salvation. Afterwards he endeavoured, as Professor at Tübingen and Heidelberg, to disperse the darkness then brooding over Germany. Having been sent on an important mission to Rome in 1498, he devoted all his spare time and money to the study of Hebrew under the learned Jew, Abdias Sphorm, and to the purchase of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, by which he hoped to promote the great work to which he had determined to consecrate all his energies. On his return to Würtemberg he published those works which greatly aided the progress of the Reformation. He translated some of the Psalms, corrected the Vulgate, and was the first in Germany to publish a Hebrew grammar and dictionary. Thus he unclosed the books of

the Old Testament to the astonished and delighted view of his fellow-countrymen.

Afterwards he became involved in a contest which proved a prelude to the Reformation. The Dominicans of Cologne, urged on by one Pfefferkorn, a Jewish convert, sought to destroy all works written in the Hebrew language, except the text of the Old Testament Scriptures. On these works the Emperor Maximilian asked Reuchlin to give his opinion. He was strongly opposed to this wholesale destruction, and mentioned some which ought to be preserved, because they contained nothing to justify the pretext for committing them to the flames, that they were hostile to Christianity. In consequence of this opinion the books of the Jews, which had been taken away to be burnt, were restored to them. The Dominicans immediately revenged themselves upon Reuchlin by raising against him a violent persecution. They threatened him with the Inquisition, and caused a court to be called at Maintz, at which his writings were adjudged to the flames as containing many heretical opinions. This contest became afterwards one between the lovers of light and the lovers of darkness, between the scholastic friars and their opponents ; for it was maintained in the course of the discussion which arose, that not only Jewish books, but all books not professedly Christian should be placed under ban and anathema, and should not be used in education. This contest gave rise to those celebrated "Letters of Obscure Men," full, as we have seen, of stinging satire, in which Hutten held up to ridicule the monkish opponents of Reuchlin, inasmuch as he causes them to perpetrate the greatest blunders, and to give the most absurd reasons, expressed in very bad Latin, for the continuance of that darkness which it was the great object of that illustrious man to scatter. This contest lasted for ten years. Ultimately the matter was carried before Leo X., who directed

the Bishop of Spires to inquire into it. He declared Reuchlin innocent, and condemned the monks to pay the expenses of the process which had been instituted against him.

. Erasmus has been accused of doing little honour to Reuchlin, and of having stood aloof from the contest between him and the divines of Cologne. In one of the "Letters of Obscure Men" he is taunted with not having come forward in defence of him. Erasmus, however, felt that from his ignorance of Hebrew he could not with any degree of authority mingle in the strife between the two parties. Writing to Cardinal Wolsey, in 1518,* he says, "As for me, I never esteemed the Cabala and Talmud." He commends Reuchlin in the same letter, adding, "I never conversed with Reuchlin except once at Frankfort. We are only on those terms of civility which usually subsist between men of letters; though, if I had been his intimate friend, I should have no reason to be ashamed of it." He also urged the Cardinals St. George and Grimani, in 1515, to use their utmost influence in aid of the cause of Reuchlin.† He told them how grieved he was in common with all Germany that these frivolous proceedings should have been taken against one venerable on account of his age and services. If, however, it were true that he had done him little honour in his life, it will be admitted that he made him ample amends after his death, in 1522, in the account of his apotheosis, or reception into heaven, already referred to, given by a Franciscan to his friend Brassicanus, who, in his turn, gives it in conversation to his friend Pompilius. The following passages, with which I conclude this chapter, establish the truth of the preceding assertion. "Can you suppose that we have any reason to lament the death of

* Op. tom. iii. p. 371, edit. Bas.

† Ibid. pp. 65 and 70.

such a man? He has had a long life, if *that* be any addition to a man's happiness. He has left monuments of his virtue which can never perish. He has, by his good deeds, consecrated his name to immortality. Now, released from all evil, he enjoys heaven, and holds converse with St. Jerome. . . . For the seed which he has sown, he is reaping an abundant harvest. In the meantime it will be our duty to cherish his sacred memory; to embalm his name with our praises; and ever and anon to address him with words like these: 'O holy soul, be propitious to languages; be propitious to those who cultivate them; favour the sacred languages; destroy all wicked tongues infected with the poison of hell.' "

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CHAPTER X.

THE REVOLT OF THE PEASANTS.—WORLDLY MOTIVES OF ERASMUS.—HIS INCOME.—OPPOSITION TO HIM IN FRANCE.—TREATISE ON MATRIMONY DEDICATED TO QUEEN CATHERINE, AND OTHER WORKS.—(A.D. 1524—1526.)

IN the year 1525 a rebellion broke out among the peasants of Germany, which was greatly prejudicial to the cause of the Reformation. It spread like a mighty conflagration among the trees of the forest. No sooner do the flames catch one tree than they advance rapidly, burning up the beautiful foliage, until at length the forest is involved in one vast blaze, which illumines with a ruddy glow the firmament of heaven. This was not in the first instance a religious war. An examination of the demands of the peasants will serve to show us that, when it began, it was only one of those insurrections of the cultivators of the soil against their feudal lords, of which we often read in the history of the middle ages. Goaded to madness by their accumulated wrongs, they had risen simultaneously against their oppressors. But no sooner had the enthusiast, Munzer, constituted himself leader of the armed rabble, than the war assumed a religious character. He pretended that he was armed with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, and that he was commissioned to mow down, like the bearded grain,

the armies of the Midianites. The motives of the insurgents were various. Some insisted on an absolute immunity from all government; others asserted that their object was to establish a pure Church in Germany; many were influenced merely by the spirit of sedition, and by the desire to obtain deliverance from the taxes and burdens which pressed so heavily upon them; while many perversely misunderstood Luther's doctrine of religious liberty, and deluded themselves with the idea that they should obtain deliverance from the tyranny of their feudal oppressors. The mind recoils with horror from the contemplation of the atrocities of the peasants, which were only surpassed by the atrocities perpetrated in the suppression of the revolt. Erasmus says that one hundred thousand perished in this war.* The soul of Luther was much vexed by this rebellion. He denounced, in language so strong, the impiety and madness of these zealots, that he lost his popularity with the multitude. This rebellion served to alienate Erasmus still more from the Reformation. It seemed to him to justify his gloomy forebodings that the principles of Luther must lead to civil convulsions, and to give him a reason for that cautious timidity which induced him to endeavour, by peaceable means, to remedy the disorders, and to remove the abuses, of the Roman Catholic Church. We can have no doubt, indeed, that the Reformation gave that impulse to the people which led them to seek deliverance from the iron yoke of bondage. But we are sure that, as Luther asserted, it served greatly to check their fury, and to preserve the fabric of the Church and the State from being shattered into fragments. We must remember, too, that if we argue from the abuse against the use, we must surrender our most valuable blessings; that if the timid policy of Erasmus had been followed, the Roman Catholic religion would have

* Op. tom. iii. 888, F. 900, edit. Lugd.

retained its ascendancy in Europe ; and that the Reformation could not, as I have stated before, have been accomplished without those convulsions, civil and religious, which caused the earth to tremble to its centre, and seemed to many likely to dissolve society into its original elements.

A letter, written at the beginning of the year 1525 to the learned Reformer, *Æcolampadius*, exhibits Erasmus in a very unfavourable point of view, for it shows the worldly motives by which he was unhappily influenced.* *Æcolampadius*, in a preface to his Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, had spoken of him as “our great Erasmus.” This commendation had given him the greatest offence ; for it was, he thought, calculated to injure him with many of this world’s potentates, whose good opinion he was anxious to possess. They would come to the conclusion that he held the same opinions with his eulogist. This letter begins in the following manner : “I pretend not to pass sentence on you ; I leave that to the Lord, to whom you stand or fall. But I consider what do several great men think of you ? the Emperor, the Pope, Ferdinand, the King of England, the Bishop of Rochester, Cardinal Wolsey, and many others, whose authority it is not safe for me to despise, and whose favour it is not prudent for me to disregard. You know very well that there are some who look upon you Reformers as heresiarchs and schismatics. Now, what will such persons say, upon reading in your ‘Preface’ the words : ‘Our Great Erasmus ?’ Will not the consequence be that the dangerous suspicions of powerful princes, or implacable enemies, who had begun to think a little better of me since the publication of my ‘Diatribes,’ will be all revived ?”

We cannot condemn in terms too strong this letter of Erasmus. If *Æcolampadius* had praised him in private, he would have been delighted ; for he thought very well of him,

* Op. tom. iii. ep. 728, edit. Lugd.

and was pleased to occupy a high place in his good opinion. But he fancied that the personages just referred to would be led to identify him with the Reformers, and would deprive him of the pensions which he enjoyed from them, and of their patronage. Thus he thought that he might be reduced to that state of evangelical poverty of which he speaks in a subsequent letter. Even Jortin, who was his great admirer, is obliged to admit that "it is a despicable meanness to be afraid of being commended by those whom we secretly honour and value, lest we should give offence to others whom we esteem not, and lest we should suffer in our worldly interests."* This subservience to the great has left a deep stain upon his character.

But though in public Erasmus wished to disavow all connection with Œcolampadius, in his private letters to his friends he spoke in the highest terms of this eminent Reformer. All students of the history of this period are aware that an angry controversy was at this time raging between Luther and Zuinglius on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Luther held that "the glorified body of Christ was to be found in all parts of the bread." Zuinglius, on the contrary, held that "the flesh of Christ is of immense utility to us, for it saves us from perdition ; but in so far as it is eaten by us, it is of no use to us at all." Œcolampadius, at length ashamed of having preached doctrines, the soundness of which he had begun to suspect, espoused the cause of Zuinglius. He thus wrote to him from Basle : "That dogma of the real presence is the fortress and safeguard of their impiety. As long as they shall keep to that idol none will be able to vanquish them."† He then entered the lists by publishing a work on the meaning of our Lord's words,

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 370.

† D'Aubigné's "Hist. of the Reformation," vol. ii. p. 463.

"This is My body." Erasmus, in a letter to P. Barbirius, highly commends this work, saying, "It is so accurately written, and contains so many arguments and testimonies, that it might deceive the very elect."* Again, writing to his friend Pirckheimer, he says, "The opinion of Œcolampadius would not displease me, if the consent of the Church did not hinder me from accepting it. For I discern not what good an invisible substance can do there, or how it could profit any one if it were discernible."† Again, writing to the same friend afterwards, in the year 1527, he says, "I never said that this sentiment was the soundest. It is true that among some friends I went so far as to say that I could adopt that sentiment, if the authority of the Church had approved it; but I added, that I could by no means dissent from the Church. By the Church I mean the consent of the body of Christian people. For my part I spoke sincerely; and I never doubted the truth of the Eucharist. What weight the authority of the Church may have with others I know not; but with me it weighs so much that I could be of the same opinion with the Arians and Pelagians, if the Church had supported their doctrines."‡ In a letter afterwards written to Pelican, who spread the report that he held the same opinions with himself on the subject of the Eucharist, he very strongly condemns the doctrines of the Reformers. "I would rather be torn in pieces than profess the same opinions as yourself, and I would rather endure every evil than leave the world with this sin on my conscience."§ Language like the above needs scarcely any comment. These opinions often repeated have led many Protestants and Roman Catholics to believe that he was sceptical as to the fundamental truths of Christianity.

* Op. tom. iii. p. 894, ed. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 941.

‡ Ibid. p. 698, ed. Bas.

§ Ibid. p. 966, ed. Lugd.

At this time Erasmus published his "Lingua," a treatise on the good and bad use of the Tongue, which he dedicated to Schydlowitz, Chancellor of Poland. It seems from some passages in it that he formed the plan of it in England.* This discourse abounds with wit, and with ingenious censures of the vices of the times, particularly those of the monks. It is full of anecdotes, illustrative of his subject. All immoderate swearers, liars, talkers, and slanderers, will find many lessons in this treatise, delivered with much wit, and in an agreeable manner. I have no space for extracts from the work, but I must strongly recommend it to my readers, who, I am sure, will derive pleasure and profit from the perusal of it.

A short time before the publication of this treatise, Erasmus had been anxious to secure the payment of the pension which, as I have said, had been promised to him by the Emperor Charles V., before he left England in 1513. Hither to it had been paid, while he resided at Louvain. One condition was, however, annexed to the payment of that pension, with which he was unwilling to comply, that he should return to the Low Countries. He pleaded that his debts would prevent him from doing so. He thus wrote to Carondelet, Archbishop of Palermo : "I live here (Basle) at a great expense, because of my bad health, and my frequent illnesses, and I never was a good economist. I have contracted several debts, so that if my health would, my creditors perhaps would not permit me to depart."† We have reason, however, to believe that his debts were only an excuse for not going to Brabant. He felt also that if, in compliance with the urgent request of Charles, he should return, he would find difficulties in the way of the payment of his pen-

* Op. tom. iv. p. 551, edit. Bas.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 794, ed. Ludg.

sion ; for, he said, "the Emperor's Court is ever in a state of poverty."*

His circumstances were easy when he went to live at Basle, in 1521, and we have no reason to think that they had undergone any change since that date. He then describes himself as possessing an annual income of 300 ducats, exclusive of presents made to him by his patrons. "I have," he said, "ceased to complain. I have enough to maintain myself comfortably, and something to spare for an indigent friend."† We learn afterwards, from a letter to the Bishop of Augsburg, that in this estimate were included his two pensions from England, amounting to 200 florins annually, which were diminished to the amount of one-fourth part, by the merchants who remitted them, and a pension which he had in Flanders, from a prebend which he resigned.‡ The pension from England was contingent on the life of the Archbishop ; for, in the same letter he says, "if he should die, I shall never see a penny more of it." "Thus," with the loss of his pension from the Emperor, and of the other which P. Barbirius had begun to intercept, he writes : "Erasmus will soon be reduced to a state of evangelical poverty ; though, by the blessing of God, he is not altogether as yet in that condition." From a letter written in 1525, to his friend Goclenius, Professor of Latin at Louvain, it appears that he was not at all in want of money, for he made in it a sort of last will and testament. He left to Goclenius 400 florins of gold, and to other friends various smaller sums. "As for my plate and jewels," he adds, "I will soon dispose of them."§

Erasmus did not make anything by his works, notwith-

* Jortin's "Life," vol. i. p. 480.

† Butler's "Life of Erasmus," p. 138.

‡ Op. tom. iii. p. 1292, edit. Lugd. § Ibid. p. 1422.

standing the enormous sale of them ; for in the profit arising from it, which could not have been large, as the expenses of publication, which the printers undertook, were great, it was considered beneath the dignity of an author to share. He had unquestionably great expenses. He had to employ transcribers of his works, and to keep horses for the purpose of travelling himself from place to place, to consult books and manuscripts, and to send messengers to collect his pensions. He was, however, a bad manager, and extravagant. One instance of his extravagance we have, in a letter to Warham, in 1521 :—" I think myself," he says, " a sort of nobleman, for I maintain two horses, who are better fed, and two servants who are better clad, than their master."* We can have no doubt that the liberality of his friends supplied all deficiencies, and that he never had the least reason to fear that he should become dependent for the means of support on the precarious charity of strangers.

The reason of his unwillingness to go to Brabant, is given in the following letter to his friend Pirckheimer : " What you write is very true," he says, " that Luther promotes many persons. Luther makes Canons, Bishops, and Cardinals, and enriches others, whether they will or no ; but then Luther beggars a great many, and me among the rest, to whom Margaret and the Emperor have promised the payment of my pension, but it is on condition that I return to my own country. A hard condition ! for Egmond reigns there, a madman, armed with the instruments of death, who hates me twice as much as he hates Luther. His colleague is one Hulst, a sworn enemy to learning. These Inquisitors first fling men into a dungeon, and then seek for accusations against them. Of these things the Emperor is ignorant, and yet it were to be wished that he knew them."†

The truth was that though, as he informs Goclenius in

* Op. tom. iii. p. 645, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. iii. p. 782.

the letter above referred to, he would sooner have gone to Turkey, than to Basle, if he had known the perfidious temper of the Germans, yet he knew not where else to go, for he was justly afraid of every place where the monks had any influence, because they continued to follow him with bitter and unrelenting hostility. At all events, in that city, he was safe from their vengeance. He was unwilling for the same reason at this time to take up his abode in France. Francis I. had been for a long time anxious to secure his assistance in a college, which he wished to establish at Paris, for the purpose of teaching the learned languages. He was one of his warmest admirers, and even preferred him to Budæus, considered by many at that time to be the most learned man in Europe. A rivalry had existed for some time between Erasmus and him, which was justly considered as a contest for the primacy in learning. Posterity has decided in favour of Erasmus. It has admitted that in a knowledge of Greek, Budæus may have surpassed him; but that in general erudition, genius, and taste, Erasmus was greatly his superior. Budæus informed him in the year 1516, that he was authorized by Francis to offer him a benefice with an income of a 1000 francs. As his friend, Cuthbert Tonnill, afterwards Bishop of Durham, was then at Paris, he consulted him on the offers of the French King. Tonnill dissuaded him from accepting them. He was a little afraid even then of the religious animosity with which he was likely to be assailed at Paris, and he had some distrust of the King's constancy. The end of the matter was that he declined the flattering proposal. The offer of Francis was constantly renewed, but he was, in the year 1525 and 1526 less likely than ever to accept them, for reasons which I shall now proceed to explain.

In February, 1525, France was filled with consternation. Francis I. was defeated in the battle of Pavia.

After displaying heroic courage, he surrendered his sword to Lannoy, the Viceroy of Naples, and was carried off a prisoner to Madrid. "Nothing whatever is left me," the King wrote to his mother, "save my honour and my life." The enemies of the Reformers, who were anxiously watching for an opportunity of arresting the rapid progress which their opinions were making in France, determined to extract material of accusation against them from this heavy calamity. Acting in the spirit of those who endeavoured to stifle Christianity in its cradle by representing it as the cause of those calamities which had descended upon the nations, they affirmed that because France had for some time nurtured heretics in her bosom, God was now pouring out on a guilty land the vials of His wrath. Their opinion was that the only way to deliver the King from the captivity which was to be considered as a judgment from God upon him on account of his leniency towards the Reformers, and to save the kingdom from subjection to a foreign yoke, was to unsheathe against them the sword of persecution, and to mow them down on the right hand and on the left. Noel Bedier, or Bedda, as he preferred calling himself, in memory, perhaps, of the venerable Bede, the syndic of the Sorbonne, and Lecouturier, chiefly known by his Latin name Sutor, a doctor of the Sorbonne, and a Carthusian, exerted every effort to inflame the passions of the nation against the Reformers. Bedda was one of those whose element is strife. He delighted in searching out heretics, and making them before they existed. The mother of the King, Louise, who was now regent of the kingdom, was the more willing to listen to Bedda and Sutor, because she hoped, by the sacrifice of a few heretics, to propitiate a Pontiff who had the power of raising Italy against the Emperor, and of compelling him to deliver Francis from his captivity. The Parliament, acted on by the impulse which had been given to the nation,

issued a commission to certain persons to prosecute those who were tainted with the doctrines of Luther. The first person whom they arrested was Briçonnet, Bishop of Meaux. He had assailed the abuses of the Church, and had attacked the Sorbonne itself. By a shameful retractation, which has left an indelible stain upon his memory, he saved himself from the dungeon and the stake. Lefèvre, another celebrated Reformer, only escaped from his persecutors by becoming an exile from the land of his birth. Berquin, of whom I shall speak more particularly hereafter, was the next person apprehended. He had learnt his heresy from the writings of Erasmus and Luther. Nothing so much excited the anger of their persecutors as that the Reformers opposed the doctrine of human merit. "When I see," said Bedda, "these three men, Lefèvre, Erasmus, and Luther, endued in other respects with so penetrating a genius, yet united in a conspiracy against meritorious works, and in favour of resting the whole weight of salvation on faith alone, I am no longer surprised that thousands of men, seduced by these doctrines, have learned to say: 'Why should I fast, and martyrize my body?' Let us banish from France this odious doctrine of grace. There is a dismal deception of the devil in that neglect of merits."*

But the eager desire of Bedda and his colleagues for victims still remained unsatisfied. The Bishop of Meaux had apostatized; Lefèvre had gone into exile, and Berquin might, through the intercession of Margaret, the sister of the King, yet be delivered from his persecutors. They, therefore, resolved to attempt a higher aim. They would attack Erasmus, whom they considered as the great arch-heretic. If they could induce the Sorbonne to censure his writings, they might hope to arrest the onward march of

* D'Aubigné's "Hist. of the Reformation," vol. ii. p. 622.

the Reformation in France. Sutor began the attack by a publication in which he brought against his opponents all the unjust charges, and heaped upon them all the abusive epithets which malice could invent, or the vocabulary of vituperation supply. Erasmus answered him in an "Apology" dedicated to Joannes Selva.* From a passage in the dedication it appears to have been written when Francis I. was made prisoner in 1525. The contest was like one between a giant and a pygmy. Sutor was completely crushed. Erasmus represents him as the greatest fool with whom he was ever called upon to contend. In this "Apology" he says, "I have learnt something from Lee; Latomus has brought before me some things which deserve careful consideration; Stunica has taught me much, though foreign to the subject with which he was occupied. From this very wordy book of Sutor's, I do not see what can be learnt except mad calumnies. Speaking of matters which he does not understand, he reminds one," said Erasmus, "of the old proverb: '*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*' 'Let the cobbler keep to his last.'"

Bedda immediately rushed to raise Sutor from the ground to which, in the unequal wrestling match, he had been mercilessly flung by his powerful antagonist. He stood forward in front of him and challenged Erasmus to a mortal combat. He exerted his malice in collecting various passages from the writings of Erasmus which seemed to favour the Lutherans, and wresting them altogether from their connection with the context, translated them into French, and published them in a volume, which he circulated through France. Erasmus immediately accepted his challenge, and published his defence.† On finding that Bedda returned to the charge in a work professing to expose the

* Op. tom. ix. p. 742, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 453.

errors of Faber and Erasmus, the latter wrote a most elaborate reply to him.* According to his calculation, Bedda, on a very moderate computation, had been guilty of a hundred and eighty-one lies, three hundred and ten calumnies, and forty-seven blasphemies. "If the Church," said he, "is not supported by a better Atlas, it is high time to write its epitaph. I have nothing in common with the sentiments of Luther; but it cannot be denied that the doctrine of Luther approaches more nearly to the true spirit of Christianity than the theology of Bedda. For what is it that Bedda has in view? It is this, to make men set a great esteem on scholastic quibbles, vain subtilties, human ordinances, the worshipping of images, the differences of meats and of garbs, their own works, and a holy week spent in acts of penance. As to true evangelical piety, he says nothing at all about it, or he talks so coldly that any one may see that what he says proceeds not from the heart. We ought, he says, to place our confidence in God, and principally in our own good works.

"Nothing can be so well expressed that this man will not wrest and distort it. . . . What is more venerable and holy than the Lord's Prayer? If you will give me leave, I will play the Bedda upon it. 'Our Father. . . .' This smells of Arianism, as if the Father alone were to be invoked as the only true God; for here is no mention made of the Son and the Holy Ghost. 'OUR FATHER'—dangerous words!—since Christians may imagine that they are the children of God by nature, even as Jesus Christ. It should have been, 'Our Father by adoption, and not by nature. . . .'"

Erasmus published another reply to some remarks of

* "*Desiderii Erasmi Supputatio Errorum in Censuris Beddæ.*" Op. tom. ix. p. 515, edit. Lugd.

Bedda, from which it appears that the Syndic was stung to the quick by the manner in which the former attacked him.

But these "Apologies" proved of no avail. Roused by the vehement accusations of the fanatical Bedda and his associates, the Sorbonne prepared a grave censure for the illustrious writer. Erasmus was overwhelmed with consternation. His attempt to conciliate both parties had altogether failed of the wished-for success. Roman Catholics, as well as Protestants, were now assailing him with merciless rancour. He addressed a letter of vehement remonstrance to the Sorbonne.* "I hoped," he writes, "that if I had been beaten down in my conflict with the Lutheran faction, I should have found with you a quiet haven and a safe refuge. But now you send forth bitterer attacks upon me than have ever been written by any of your members against Luther. Meanwhile, in resolving not to depart from the Church, I, who was once very popular with the Germans, have made myself most hateful to them. I have provoked Luther, like a venomous beast, to attack me. I have for some time been obliged to submit to the murmurs, the threats, the reproaches, the defamatory and furious libels of the whole faction, which is more powerful than any one would believe, and increases in strength daily. I engaged in a work to which my strength was unequal, but I obeyed the Pope, the Emperor, and the Princes. And as if it were not enough to be attacked by the Lutherans, I have been obliged to contend with the Zuinglians, who, on the question of the Eucharist, differ from them. . . . While I was thus engaged according to my ability in a matter in which your learning ought to have aided me, the Sutors and the Beddas attack me from behind. If you shall allow such books to

* Jortin, vol. ii. p. 492.

be printed as these men write against me, and if mine should be prohibited, certainly they will have gained the victory. This, however, is not to refute me, but to bear me down by tyrannical violence."

He addressed, also, a letter to the King, in which he made the following attack upon the fanatical doctors of the Sorbonne. "They make a pretence of religion," he said, "but they aspire to tyranny. If the prince shall not in everything submit to their will, they will say that he is a heretic, and that he ought to be deprived of his kingdom by the Church."* This passage seems almost like a prophecy of the murder of Henry III. of France, which was instigated by them. He also asked the King to restrain the fury of Bedda and Sutor.

Erasmus did not address himself to Francis in vain. The King issued an edict prohibiting the sale of Bedda's book. But he could not, as we shall see hereafter, save him from the censure with which he was threatened. The preceding history, while it shows that Erasmus could not safely take up his abode in France, will also show how little inclined he was to imitate that Saviour who, "when He was reviled, reviled not again;" how completely his boasted scheme of conciliation had failed of success, inasmuch as he was abused by all parties; and will furnish another instance of that timidity which led him to shrink from suffering or sacrifice for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, and of that love of the good opinion of men, which led him, when danger threatened, to seek protection from the highest and mightiest of this world's potentates.

Erasmus published several devotional and other works in the years 1525 and 1526, besides his treatise on the "Tongue." His "Christian Widow," published in the last

* Op. tom. iii. p. 944, edit. Lugd.

year, was written in honour of Maria, sister of Charles V., whose husband, the King of Bohemia, was killed prematurely in battle. But his book on "Christian Matrimony" was the most remarkable work of that year.* It was dedicated to Catherine of Arragon, the Queen of Henry VIII. He had a very exalted opinion of this illustrious and unfortunate lady. He thus speaks of her in a letter to her royal husband, prefixed to the "Paraphrase on St. Luke's Gospel," which was published three years before this time; "Your noble wife, a singular example of true piety to the present age, scorning the trifles of women, spends a great part of the day in reading religious books, thus reminding other royal ladies who waste the greatest part of their time in gambling, or in similar amusements, how they ought to conduct themselves."† He says that she is remarkable, not only for her piety, but also for her learning; and that she had so carefully educated her daughter Mary, that he could highly commend her elegant Latin epistles.‡ The work above referred to contains many excellent observations on the choice of a partner for life, on the duties of husbands and wives, on the means of strengthening love after marriage, and on other points relating to the marriage bond which are suitable to people in every age. Many were offended because he spoke in it more highly of marriage than of celibacy, and suggested that marriage is not a Sacrament. It appears from the dedication, and from a letter to a friend, that, in compliance with Queen Catherine's request, he had promised to write this work some time ago.§

* Op. tom. v. p. 512, edit. Bas. † Op. tom. vii. p. 207, edit. Bas.

‡ "Habemus Angliæ Reginam, fœminam egregie doctam, cujus Maria filia scribit bene Latinas epistolas." Epist. Vergaræ, Op. tom. iii. p. 621, edit. Bas. "Regina . . . non minus pietate suspi-cienda quàm eruditione." Epist. Bombasio, Ibid. p. 93.

§ Ibid. p. 814.

He had, however, hitherto been prevented by illness, by engagements, and by his troubles from fulfilling his promise. The following short extracts will give the reader some idea of it. It will be seen that parts have a bearing on the question of the divorce which was then in agitation.

“Although we ought to pay very great attention to every part of our daily life, we ought to be most anxious about those parts which not only have their own peculiar advantages or disadvantages, but are also the seed plot from which good or bad affections, opinions, and actions germinate. The husbandman, though he knows that in every part of his work he must show unslumbering watchfulness, yet looks especially after the roots of his trees, doubtless because he is well aware that the preservation of the tree itself depends upon them. The officers also whose business it is, while they do not neglect the conduits, first of all look to the fountains, because if these are polluted, the public suffer greatly. The holy patriarchs, also, in the whole of whose life we may find rules for our guidance, wherever they settled, took the greatest care to provide themselves with fountains of pure water; they constantly waged war for them, and when they were closed up, again dug them. Their posterity always evinced a religious regard for them, as if they were sacred things bequeathed to them by their ancestors. Now, it appears to me that matrimony is the root and the principal fountain from which the greatest part of human happiness or misery proceeds. If proper care were taken in regard to the steps which lead to it, and to the whole of its subsequent course, all worldly affairs would be much better managed than they are at the present time. And yet I do not know how it has happened that scarcely any department of duty is more neglected by Christians than the one before us. We must think that the public welfare depends upon it, unless indeed we are prepared to

maintain that it is a matter of no importance who were the parents of our public men, with what opinions their minds have been inoculated, after what example their character has been formed at home ; or unless we think that he who has led a disgraceful and wicked life in the midst of his household can properly manage the affairs of others. Accordingly, we find that the great philosophers of antiquity in general, but especially those whose works stand out from those of the common herd, Aristotle, Xenophon, and Plutarch, who, taking nature as their guide, have laid down certain rules for good living, have written on no subject in a more religious manner than on matrimony. Moreover, those who have framed rules for the proper regulation of our life, which have come down to us, have paid attention especially to matrimony, and have given many directions which tend to the holiness of wedlock, and the strengthening of the marriage bond, and many rules for the proper education of children. Of this kind are the numerous laws as to betrothal, as to adultery and divorce, as to the jurisdiction of parents over their children, and the duties of children to their parents. Among Christians, however, less attention has been given to matrimony than it deserved.”*

He afterwards makes the following observations on divorce : “No human law punishes a treacherous or ungrateful friend ; but who does not detest the betrayer of friendship, and the man who has shown ingratitude to those who have conferred favours upon him ? The civil law does not punish this wickedness, because no punishment can be devised equal to the offence, and because the execration of the public is considered as a sufficient chastisement. It is baser to be unfaithful to a friend, than to break a legal

* Op. tom. v. p. 513, edit. Bas.

contract, because friendship is cemented without bonds, without witnesses, without pledges ; by faith alone, and by mutual affection. Nor can a man be bound more closely by any bonds, than by disinterested kindness. But where can there be a closer union of souls, where a more certain trust than in matrimony, where each willingly comes into the power of the other, in a measure surrendering personal liberty, and where the world is so far from entertaining the idea of divorce, that it is a bad omen even to name it in connection with the marriage ceremony? Although among the Jews and the heathen nations, the laws seem to give men the power of divorcing their wives, yet by the common feeling of mankind, divorce has always been placed in the same category with ingratitude and the betrayal of friendship. . . . Where divorce takes place, there has never been a real marriage. If the observation is correct that a friendship which can come to an end has never been a real friendship, we may say with much greater truth, that a marriage which can be dissolved, has never been a real one. I apply the word *real* to that union which is cemented by real affection between those who are equally virtuous. Now a bond which is created by our mental qualities is scarcely ever broken.”*

He afterwards thus speaks of the choice of a partner for life: “My first direction is that you should pray earnestly for a right and happy judgment. Then you should consider what your aim should be ; a right or wrong choice depends upon it. Those who choose a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law, chiefly on account of their wealth or their age, or because the one or the other belongs to a noble family or a powerful party, often bring about a most unhappy marriage, for the happiness of wedlock depends chiefly on a properly assorted union, and on a

* Op. tom. v. pp. 515—517, edit. Bas.

perpetual harmony between those who are virtuous and equals in birth. I must own that not without reason is that saying commended, 'Marry an equal;' for as, according to the proverb, equals are most easily brought to associate with equals, so they remain in the closest union. This equality is not to be estimated by wealth only, but by advantages of every description. In making this calculation, we must first of all take into account mental qualities, then personal endowments, then what may be said to be external to both of them. With regard to the first, an order of a certain kind is to be observed. There are mental gifts which do not necessarily render men good, as docility, a good memory, learning, eloquence, shrewdness, quickness, because these may be abused, and applied to base purposes. But chastity, sobriety, temperance, modesty, truth, prudence, faith, vigilance, wherever they exist, at once make a man happy. If the woman possesses in the least degree any of these qualities, you may indulge the hope that her character may be made to resemble your own; and this hope will become certainty if to a good natural disposition a good education should be added. We may form our opinion of vices in the same manner. There are certain mental qualities which, as men say, are inscribed on the very forehead, as chastity, gentleness, modesty. The conversation, however, is the most certain indication of the state of the mind. 'Speak, young man,' said Socrates, 'that I may see you;' for the philosopher had his eyes in his ears, not in his face. Many think it enough to have seen the young woman whom they wish to marry; if, however, they really desire to see her, let them converse with her, that they may not be deceived in her; let them carefully inquire amongst whom, and in what manner, she has been brought up. It is of great importance that she should

have been well-born ; but it is of far greater consequence that she should have been properly educated. It not unfrequently happens that we see young men and maidens, who have the very best parents, and are remarkable for their natural endowments, who have yet, through the neglect of their education, so far degenerated from their former selves, that they seem worse than changelings. On the other hand we see illegitimate children who have been brought up carefully in a good family, surpassing in personal qualities those of better birth than themselves. We must consider also, not only what are their natural endowments, but also how to adjust them ; for those who are exactly alike do not always suit one another. If a young man should be naturally somewhat sluggish, he wants a wife of an active disposition. If the husband be inclined to extravagance, he should have a frugal wife, who will limit his expenditure. If he should be of an ardent character, he will want a wife accustomed to self-restraint, who knows at times how to yield, and to comply with his wishes. Different qualities of this kind are found even amongst those who are naturally good ; which, unless they are properly blended together, make a marriage unhappy.

“In considering the gifts of the mind, we must see first of all how they have conducted themselves towards their parents, and how they have discharged their duty towards God. For those may be trained to every virtue who have learnt true piety. . . . He who wishes to choose a good wife must first become a good man. In forming our judgment we must have regard to the advice of our elders or our parents, not only because love, a blind judge as men call him, usually imposes on young men and maidens, but also because those who are advanced in life, and have a larger knowledge of the world, can form a better judgment than the young who are led more by their carnal appetites than by reason,

and whose ignorance engenders a blind confidence, and exposes them the more to danger because they do not apprehend it. To love, *bad* qualities often seem to be *good* ones. Violence and ferocity in a suitor are dignified with the name of bravery ; extravagance is called liberality. In the same manner in a young woman immodest repartee or banter is called sprightliness, and lasciviousness, which exhibits itself in the eyes, the gait, and in every gesture, is considered as an indication of affability or courtesy. Some there are who think well of a female if at an entertainment she eats and drinks as little as possible, not knowing that she has made a good meal before she came to it ; if she does not hold out her left hand where she ought to use her right hand ; if she touches what she eats with the tips of her fingers ; if, when she laughs, she does not show her teeth. They imagine that a female who has been carefully instructed in trifles of this kind is a suitable wife for them. Nay, rather goodness must be deeply seated in the mind, and must exhibit itself without disguise in the forehead, the eyes, the countenance, and in every movement of the body.”*

He thus speaks afterwards of personal beauty. “ Of this men judge very absurdly. Beauty and youth are the first considerations, which, if they are the only reasons for our love, cannot ensure its continuance. For since the flower of youth is very short-lived, and beauty of form, not only from the advance of years, but also often from other causes, is sure to decay, love must perish also, where the personal charms, in which it had its origin, have ceased to exist. Love, therefore, which we wish to be enduring, must depend upon advantages which are independent of the circumstances of our outward condition, and are unaffected by the progress of years. Hear, Christian suitor, the opinion of the wise man,† ‘ Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain ;

* Op. tom. v. p. 549, edit. Bas.

† Prov. xxxi. 30.

but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.' When you are ravished with personal attractions, you are loving a rose which must soon fade. A beautiful skin is often like a false dye, hiding the deformity of the mind. Why then do you keep your eyes fixed on the outward appearance? Make use of the eyes of the philosopher and look at the beauty of the soul. *That* by itself is sufficient to unite us in perpetual love. But if beauty of the body be added to it, like gold placed on a jewel, we must not reject the gift of God, only taking care that we do not set too high a value on it. The soul which fears God, and breaks none of His commandments, has neither spot nor wrinkle. What does it matter if the skin has not a blemish when the whole soul is defiled with the spots of sin? . . . * The eye which sees only the beauty of the body, is not the eye of the philosopher. He, through the veil of the flesh, sees the beauty of the soul and fixes his love upon it. For modesty, simplicity, the countenance itself, the general appearance, are a kind of sermon to a wise man. . . . † Hear what the prophet says : ' All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth : but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' ‡ These things the prophet is directed not to speak, but to cry aloud to deaf men. Now what is personal beauty, but the flower of grass? But you hear of another kind of beauty which shall bloom even in extreme old age : ' The word of our God shall stand for ever.' Where the word of God flourishes, you find perpetual grace and beauty, ensuring a love which shall never die." §

The above translation will, I imagine, convey to the reader a correct idea of a treatise which extends, in Latin, over 90 pages in the Basle folio. We may observe in

* Op. tom. v. p. 564, edit. Bas.

† Ibid. p. 551.

‡ Isai. xl. 6, 8.

§ Op. tom. v. p. 554, edit. Bas.

various passages, allusions to the peculiar circumstances of Catherine of Arragon. The following, for instance, seems like an exhortation to the king: "If her beauty and strength decay, let her still be dear to you, provided her character is without spot or wrinkle."* Now the historian informs us "that the Queen was older than the King by no less than six years; and that the decay of her beauty, together with particular infirmities and diseases, had contributed, notwithstanding her blameless character and deportment, to render her person unacceptable to him."† His observations on divorce will be read with much interest in their connection with her. When his treatise was written he thought that, as I have stated, "where divorce takes place, there has never been a real marriage." Many years afterwards he says, in a letter to a friend, that he is not a little disturbed on account of the commotions which had long attended the divorce.‡ He says at first that no one can say that he has expressed approbation or disapprobation of it, assigning as his reasons his post as counsellor to the Emperor, gratitude to Henry VIII., and friendship to Sir Thomas Boleyn.§ He states in another letter that the matter had been under deliberation for eight years, and insinuates that the Court of Rome did not think it desirable to expedite it, as the delay served to fill her coffers.|| Our immortal bard has represented Henry VIII. as expressing the same opinion :

"I may perceive
These Cardinals trifle with me: I abhor
This dilatory sloth, and tricks of Rome."¶

* Op. tom. v. p. 585, edit. Bas.

† Hume's "History of England" (The Student's Hume), p. 263.

‡ "Doleo res Angliæ spectare ad graves tumultus." Knight's "Life," p. 255.

§ "Letter to Damianus a Goes," Op. tom. iii. p. 1471, edit. Lugd.

|| Knight's "Life," p. 255. ¶ Shakespeare's "Henry VIII."

He says also, "If the Pope should pronounce that it is not a lawful marriage, first of all he will offend the Emperor, and then he will condemn the Roman See which has given a dispensation contrary to law." Afterwards he *does* give an opinion on the subject. With his usual vacillation he takes a totally different view of divorce from that which he had expressed in the "Treatise on Matrimony," and says in the letter just referred to: "The King not without reason has a scrupulous conscience, when two hundred doctors have plainly proved by scriptural arguments that this marriage is contrary to the laws of God and man." He adds, "Something else troubles the King in connection with this matter, which he does not wish to be mentioned."

The following extracts from a letter to the Queen, exactly suited to her state and circumstances, in which he plainly refers to the divorce, may be interesting to the reader.* It was written two years after the publication of the "Treatise on Christian Matrimony." "Most uncommon it is to see a female brought up amid the pleasures of a Court, the favoured child of prosperity, which often spoils those who have been most carefully trained, deriving comfort from holy prayers, and from the study of the Sacred Scriptures. . . . Whoever truly loves God fixes the anchor of his hope, not in the barren sands of a transitory world, but on Christ Jesus our Lord, that solid rock which can be shaken by no billows. He is the Spouse of pious souls, in that degree common to all, that no husband is more the peculiar property of his wife, than He belongs to, and is present with, all His followers. He who rests with full confidence on His bosom, and casts all his care on that God who continually watches over him, is calm and happy in the midst of worldly commotions. The soul which has given up itself altogether

* Op. tom. iii. p 646 edit. Bas.

to this Bridegroom, rejoices not less in adversity than in prosperity. . . . Christ is often kinder to us when He visits us with afflictions than when He soothes us with soft delights. Prosperity is more pleasant to a man, but very often adversity is more profitable to him. There is no way to heavenly glory but through the cross. This path is common to all ; whether, as Horace says, 'we are kings or poor husbandmen.' O illustrious Queen, and singular example of piety, may the Lord Jesus, the fountain of all happiness, breathe through your soul a holy calm, a pure and lasting joy !"

CHAPTER XI.

ERASMUS AT ENMITY WITH THE REFORMERS.—HIS LOVE OF FAME.—CONTINUED OPPOSITION OF THE MONKS.—HIS “CICERONIANUS.”—DEPARTURE FROM BASLE TO FRIBURG.—LOUIS DE BERQUIN.—(A.D. 1526–1530.)

WE are delighted when we see Erasmus, at the beginning of the Reformation, laying bare the secret chambers of iniquity, unfolding abominations which shunned the face of day, lashing with his wit and satire, that thrice-knotted scourge, a debauched, indolent, and avaricious clergy, and sharpening that sword of the Spirit with which others have vanquished the confederated legions of darkness. Judging from these antecedents, we might naturally suppose that he would have made common cause with the Lutheran Reformers in their terrible struggle with their foes. But a gulf separated him from them. He could not join them in making their own interpretations of Scripture the rule of faith, instead of the authority of the Church. He could not accept Luther's view of justification by faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, which the latter considered an essential and fundamental doctrine. I have shown that this was the case when I spoke of the “*Enchiridion*,” and I shall adduce additional evidence of the truth of this assertion in the next chapter. He understood by faith in Christ, as we have already seen,

the imitation of His example. He tells us in the "Paraclesis" that he would have us worship "the living and breathing image of Christ" in the writings of the Evangelists ; where, as we learn from the "Enchiridion," he understands by Christ "not an unmeaning word, but love, singleness, patience, and purity." He says in one of his "Apologies," that he does not know what Luther means when he states that good works must follow faith. In fact, we gather from various passages that he considers that to be a Christian is not to be justified by faith in Christ, but to exhibit in the whole course of our life and conversation a transcript, however faint, of those graces and virtues which dignified and adorned the all perfect character of our Divine Master.

Other reasons may be assigned for his unwillingness to join the Lutheran movement. He thought, as I have said, that he saw in the war of the peasants a confirmation of his fears that the Reformation, as conducted by Luther, would lead to commotions which would have the effect of dissolving society into its original elements. Thus, in his "Hyperaspistes," after venturing, as we have seen, on an unfortunate prediction, "that no name under the sun would be held in greater execration than the name of Luther," he proceeds to say : "The beginnings of the mischief he has done we have already in the Peasants' War."* He became also very hostile to the Reformers on account of the incessant attacks which they made upon him, because he would not come forward and assail the stronghold of their foes. I think, as I have before said, that here they showed a great want of judgment ; for he was altogether unequal to work of this description. He tells us, too, that he distrusted the Reformation because it had produced a set of

* Op. tom. ix. p. 1097, edit. Bas.

fanatics who were as hostile as the monks to the study of profane literature;* who preached Christ with their lips, but not in their lives, which were often directly at variance with the plainest precepts of the Gospel. He should not, however, have blamed the party for the faults of individuals. His alienation from them was only gradual. He saw many excellences in them which he could not fail to admire. On many points, indeed, he felt that he could agree with Luther. He knew that he was right on the question of indulgences. In the "Praise of Folly" and the "Enchiridion," he has himself expressed the same opinion on this doctrine. They agreed, too, in condemning confession, the superstitious ceremonies of the monks, the false trust in the Virgin and Saints, clerical celibacy, and other dogmas of Romanism. Accordingly, we find that for some time Erasmus treated the Reformers with great candour, and condemned every attempt to extirpate them by persecution. He wrote to the heads of the Church, declaring his agreement with Luther on many points, and recommending moderation. Even to Pope Leo, when he was full of fury, he wrote boldly, separating himself from Luther, but imploring him not to have recourse to violent measures. In the same spirit he wrote to Luther, exhorting him to be moderate. He wanted, by peaceable means, to effect the Reformation of the Church, and to maintain its unity under the Pope. On the impracticability of this scheme, I have already expressed my opinion. When he attempted to moderate the anger of the contending parties, he might just as well have attempted to stay the hurricane in its desolating progress, so that it should not lash into fury the waves of the

* This, Luther himself regrets: "*Plerique non solum sacras literas sed etiam omnes alias literas fastidiunt et contemnunt. Digni certe qui ἀνοήτοις Galatis conferantur.*"—Comment. in Epist. ad Galat. i. 6.

ocean, or uproot the giant oak, the monarch of the forest. But the fact that this attempt was made, is a proof of his generous and kindly feelings towards the Reformers.

When he found that he could not accept Luther's doctrine of justification, and that he could not for the reasons given above join the Reformers, he ought not, if he had any regard to his own consistency, to have ceased to lift up his voice as a trumpet against the corruptions of the Church of Rome. But here unfortunately we see a proof of that timidity which has tarnished the fame of services rendered to the cause of the Reformation in the early part of his career. He saw indeed fissures in the walls of the vast structure of Romanism. But he judged that they would be repaired, and that the building would continue to stand on a firm foundation. While, therefore, he saw much in the existing system which he strongly condemned, still he judged it wiser not to separate himself from it, and not to compromise his safety by casting in his lot with Luther and his associates. I know that some have quoted his own words in the "*Spongia*," in extenuation of his conduct: "I am ready to be a martyr for Christ if He will give me strength to be so; but I am unwilling to be a martyr for Luther." They have said that he had before his eyes the terrible fate of Savonarola and of others who, though they had not been heretical in the same sense as himself, had fallen victims to the anger of the Popes. But it should be remembered, that though he could not die for "Luther's paradoxes," as he calls them, he should have been ready to die for his own opinions. Savonarola continued to the close of his days to denounce the corruptions of the Church of Rome. Erasmus, however, from fear of the consequences, ceased to protest against them, and laboured to accommodate matters.

The truth was that, as he said to Pace, "he had no incli-

nation to die for the sake of truth." He was conscious that he had, by his satirical publications, rendered himself obnoxious to a large proportion of the clergy. He therefore lost no opportunity of securing the good-will of the Pope and his Cardinals. Thus, when Clement VII. was raised to the Papal throne, he congratulated him in the most flattering manner.* It gave him the greatest satisfaction, he said, to hear of his advancement. He was a man possessed of the qualities, both mental and bodily, which the very turbulent times required. In regard to himself, he could venture to swear, with Christ as his witness to his sincerity, that if his Holiness did only know how he had been solicited by great princes, and enticed by his friends, to join the Lutheran conspiracy against the Roman See, also how he had been provoked to do it by certain monks and divines, and how steadfastly he had resisted motives of every sort, he would not think him undeserving of his protection, but would punish those who had libelled him at Rome in the most scandalous manner. This author, he added, had picked out of his works a number of half sentences, and had most impudently misrepresented them. *Undoubtedly, if he could have foreseen the sectarians of the present day, he would either have suppressed many things which he had said, or written the same in a different manner. In the later editions he had left out many things, for the purpose of not giving a handle to ill-disposed persons; and would readily have altered other expressions if any one had given him a friendly hint.* On all occasions he submitted himself and his writings to the Roman See; and never should oppose its decisions, even if he thought them wrong: for he would suffer anything rather than be guilty of sedition.

But Erasmus did not wish that his connection with the Reformers should be altogether dissolved. He endeavoured

* Op. tom. iii. ep. 670, edit. Lugd.

for some time to pursue a middle course between the contending parties. To the truth of this assertion, a letter to Zuinglius, written in the very same year as the letter to Pope Clement, bears unequivocal testimony. He begins it thus: "Health, most excellent Zuinglius, I have been gratified by talking with you through your letter."* We find him then observing that many are as little pleased with the Pope as with Luther, and inveighing bitterly against the tyranny and cruelty both of bishops and of kings. What strange words are these from one who had been writing in the above strain to Pope Clement, and from one who, as we shall see directly, was constantly flattering kings! Nay, he almost avows himself a Lutheran, saying, "I seem to myself to have taught all things which Luther teaches. . . . I have refused every offer which was made to me to write against him. I am urged to do it by the Pope, by the Emperor, by Kings, by Princes, by very learned men, and my dearest friends. It is certain, however, that I shall not write at all, or that I shall so write as not to please those Pharisees." And yet in a little more than a year, he heaps upon Luther the most opprobrious epithets, and in about two years and a half, as we have seen, he represents himself to the Faculty of Paris as in full conflict with the Lutherans and Zuinglians.

This tortuous course into which Erasmus was led by his love of the praise of men, and his fear of persecution, is not very creditable to him. If he had lived in the present day, when persecution, in its worst form, is not the portion of God's Church, and there are no strong temptations to withdraw men from their allegiance to their Spiritual Leader, he would probably have been happier in his own mind, more useful to the community, and would have occupied a higher place in the good opinion of succeeding generations. Living

* Jortin, vol. ii. p. 489.

in a period of fierce controversy, he endeavoured for a time to satisfy both the contending parties, to-day identifying himself with one of them, to-morrow with the other, till at length he lost the esteem and confidence of both, and all, both Protestants and Roman Catholics, believed him to be insincere; and till he had become so perplexed in his views of religious truth, that he was unable to give a very distinct account of them, or to say very decidedly on what foundation he was building for eternity.

But at length Erasmus abandoned this feeble neutrality, and became the inveterate enemy of the Reformers. He found himself, however, as we have already seen in the case of his treatise on "Free-will," much fettered in his opposition to them by the very decided opinions which he had expressed on the great points at issue between them and their opponents. This, no doubt, was a cause of that infirmity of purpose, that timidity, that equivocation, and that resentment against them which he exhibited during the last sad years of his memorable career.

We have seen that Erasmus most reluctantly yielded to the urgent solicitations of the potentates of Europe, and wrote the treatise just referred to, a work to which he felt that he was altogether unequal. We have many instances of that vanity, that love of fame, and of the esteem of persons of rank and consequence, which led him, in complying with their wishes, to do violence to his conscientious convictions. Long before the time of which we are now speaking, he thus wrote to his friend Battus: "My equal can scarcely be found in the course of many centuries."* In a letter to Polydore Virgil in the year 1527† he says, "I stand on a very good footing with the great. Clement VII. has already given me two hundred florins, and promises me all things. The Emperor and his Chancellor have

* Op. tom. iii. ep. 94, edit. Lugd. † Ibid. p. 809, edit. Bas.

written to me in the most friendly manner. I have drawers full of letters from kings, princes, cardinals, dukes, nobles, bishops, written with the utmost civility. I receive uncommon and valuable presents from many of them."

In another letter, written in 1530, he gives the following ostentatious account of his letters and presents from "bishops, from abbots, from kings, princes, and archbishops, all well-known men.* From the Emperor Charles, I have many letters written in a tone of affection. I attach more importance to them than to his generosity, to which, however, I owe a great part of my fortune. From the Archduke Ferdinand I have several very friendly, never sent without a present. How often has the King of France invited me to his country, and what liberal offers has he made me! The King of England has given to me a proof of his kindly feelings towards me by sending to me of his own accord several letters and presents. His Queen, Catherine, the most excellent woman whom this age has produced, vies with him in this respect. Sigismund, the King of Poland, has sent me a letter with a gift of royal value: George, Duke of Saxony, often addresses letters to me, never without a present. I may also mention William, Archbishop of Canterbury, Cuthbert, formerly Bishop of London, now Bishop of Durham, and John, Bishop of Lincoln,† who besides letters more precious than jewels, usually send me every year, when I neither ask for nor expect it, a present, as a token of their friendship." He then mentions several other prelates who had sent him letters and presents, and continues thus: "A few days ago, Christopher Stadius,

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 495.

† John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, was confessor to Henry VIII. Erasmus considered him a person of great abilities. He dedicated to him some treatises of St. Athanasius, and an exposition of the 85th Psalm. (Knight's "Life," p. 188.)

Bishop of Augsburg, a man of true nobility, and remarkable for his learning, made a journey of seven days to this place, which was not altogether a safe one, for no other purpose, as he told me, than that he might see Erasmus, or rather his shadow. He brought with him two royal cups, and two hundred golden florins. I have a closet full of presents of cups, of flagons, of spoons, of clocks, some of which are of pure gold. The number of those who give me presents daily increases, though I have never made an appeal to their generosity, plainly telling them that I have quite enough for my present frugal style of living, of which I am so far from being sorry, that I would rather take away from it, than add to it."

We have many proofs, independently of his own testimony, of the esteem in which he was held by noble and distinguished individuals. He was often called by them the light of the world, and the glory of Christendom. Henry VIII. had, as we have seen, most unwillingly allowed him to depart from this country. By his desire he attended the meeting between himself and Francis I. on the Field of the Cloth of Gold. While striving for the empire, Charles V. and Francis I. competed for the honour of his residence in their dominions. A memorable letter, which he wrote to the former after the battle of Pavia, exhorting him to use his victory with generosity, shows very plainly the footing of easy familiarity on which he stood with the Emperor.* In a dialogue published about the same time he writes, "If I were Emperor, I should thus address the King of France: 'My brother, some evil genius has kindled the war between us. Fortune has made you my prisoner; she may make me yours. Your misfortune has led me to think of the misfortunes incident to humanity. The war has continued too long; let us begin another contest. I give you liberty;

* Butler's "Life," p. 133.

give me your friendship. Let the past be forgotten ; I desire no ransom. Let our only rivalry be who shall excel the other in good offices. He who shall conquer in this contest will win the noblest of triumphs.' " We have seen how Pope Leo encouraged him. He did not indeed fulfil his promises, chiefly, I believe, because he was wholly absorbed in luxury and the fine arts. The Emperor Charles V. never cast off his regard for the distinguished scholar. At the end of the year 1527, when Erasmus had become the adversary of the Reformers, we find the Emperor himself writing to him and telling him how great was his satisfaction to have been informed by his letters that the madness of the Lutherans began to decline.* "The whole Christian world," he said, "was indebted to him for having effected that which neither Emperors, nor Popes, nor Princes, nor Universities, nor numbers of learned men had been able to accomplish." Notwithstanding this gross flattery, he tells him that he had allowed the Spanish Inquisition to examine his books, but that he had nothing to fear, as he was quite convinced of his orthodoxy. If, however, it should appear that he had unintentionally been guilty of any error, or had said anything which was ambiguous in his writings, he would certainly, when he was admonished in a friendly manner, explain it, and by removing everything which might offend weak minds, secure immortality to his works.

In 1528, Henry VIII. wrote the following letter to Erasmus, which was designed to persuade him to return to his dominions.† He told him that he was much grieved to hear from Archbishop Warham that he was badly treated by men of a perverse mind, who were enemies not only to him, but also to Christianity itself ; that he thought it very disgraceful that a person whom he so highly esteemed for his learn-

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1047, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. p. 1839.

ing and abilities should be in danger of his life, and nowhere safe from their malice ; that he had always been an admirer of him, *but more especially now, when he had come forward with so much vigour and skill in defence of Christianity.* He added that, as he was determined to promote true religion in his kingdom, and bring it back to the primitive standard, that the word of God might be the test of it, so much the more concerned he was for him, lest, being taken out of the way, he should want that assistance which he was ready to afford him in the prosecution of his laudable design. He begged him to leave Italy and Germany, and to hasten to England, where he could assure him of a very kind reception. He knew by experience how many friends and patrons he had in this country, and hoped that, as they joined him in asking him to come, so he would make good his former promise of choosing England for setting up his staff.

Erasmus sent his answer through Sir Thomas More. It was to the effect that His Majesty's kind invitation gave him great relief amid all his perplexities ; but that it would become him more now to find out a place for his burial where he might be at rest, since he despaired of it while living. He desired him to make his apologies to the King for not answering the letter.

We can easily imagine that gross adulation of this description from the mightiest of the monarchs of Europe, as well as the court which was paid to him by her other kings, her princes, her dignified ecclesiastics, her nobles, her learned men, her statesmen, and her warriors, would be a sore trial to the virtue of Erasmus, especially when we remember the circumstances of his birth, as well as his want of natural friends, and even of country. We can see that he might thus be induced, even contrary to his convictions, to come forward in defence of the established hierarchy, and

to endeavour to save Romanism from the destruction with which she was threatened. When, too, we find him flattering this world's potentates, we know that we ought to remember the usages of the times, and the language in which it was the rule to address prelates and Sovereigns ; and to take into account his poverty, and his dependence upon their liberality for subsistence, and for the means of prosecuting his studies. But when we have allowed their full force to these circumstances, we cannot fail to see that his love of the praise of men detracts greatly from the value of his Christianity. Many sincere Christians have, like Erasmus, felt that timidity which, if they had given way to it, would have led them, like him, to pay court to the mighty ones of the earth, in order that they might be preserved from persecution. I believe that one reason for the determination of Erasmus to become the decided adversary of the Reformers was, that he felt that he might lose the favour of his great friends, and expose himself to danger, if he gave even the semblance of support to the cause of the Reformation. He had thus induced them, as we have just seen in the case of Henry VIII., at this time to be quite profuse in their expressions of regard for him, and to distinguish him by numerous tokens of their favour. This is the reason why Sigismund, King of Poland, had at this time written to him. He had, in order to augment his protectors among crowned heads, followed the advice of John à Lasco, and sent a letter to him, in which he complimented the King, and recommended peace to Christian princes.* Sigismund in reply sent him a very courteous letter and a present, and kindly invited him to Poland. But there is this great difference between Erasmus and the persons just referred to, that, while he allowed his timidity and his love of the praise of men to exercise full dominion over him, they

* Op. tom. iii. p. 824, edit. Bas.

were deeply grieved on account of their besetting infirmities, viewed them as hindrances to their spiritual progress, and sought earnestly for that grace which alone could enable them to gain the victory over them. *They* constantly endeavoured to act up to their conscientious convictions. *He*, however, under the influence of the feelings just referred to, endeavoured to stifle them, and conciliated the favour of emperors and kings by paying court to them, and assuring them that he would never depart from his allegiance to the Church of Rome.

The monks and divines continued to assail him with unmitigated rancour, both in France and the Low Countries. From a letter of Alphonso Fonseca, Archbishop of Toledo, who kindly offered him his protection, it appears that he was warmly attacked also in Spain.* In 1528 the Sorbonne at Paris at length published against him their censures. They were passed in the summer of 1526, but could not be issued till the approval of the other Faculties had been obtained. I have already given the decree as to the "Colloquies." The members of that body extracted more than thirty propositions from them and the "Paraphrases," and censured them in the strongest terms.† They described him as a heretic and a demoniac. His defence, entitled "*Declarationes ad Censuras Facultatis Theologiæ Parisiensis*," is an admirable specimen of his great power of evasion and address.‡ We find in it the language alternately of menace and submission. While he despised in his heart these Parisian theologians, he yet condescended to make a kind of submission to them, and to own that he had said many things very incautiously in his writings. He also abused the Reformers, and maintained that he had always been steadfast in his allegiance to the Church (an

* Op. tom. iii. p. 565, edit. Bas.

† Du Pin, iii. 240, 335.

‡ Op. tom. ix. p. 813, edit. Lugd.

assertion which is manifestly incorrect); but he admitted that he might have been guilty of serious errors while he was endeavouring to controvert their arguments. In the Preface, too, he shows his wonderful power of sarcasm; for he expresses, in language which every one can understand, his great anxiety to uphold the dignity of the theologians of Paris. Such was the end of the pacific Reformation advocated by Erasmus. He had offended the Papists without leading them to give up one iota of their dogmas. It is true, indeed, that Francis I. strongly censured the conduct of the Sorbonne, and directed the Parliament not to allow these divines to print anything which had not been previously submitted to its notice.* But still the majority of the members of the Roman Catholic Church did not believe the protestations of Erasmus that he was a loyal subject of their spiritual monarch, and ridiculed him on account of his awkward apology to the fanatical doctors of the Sorbonne; while, on the other hand, the Protestants were full of indignation against him because, after having advanced some distance towards them, as if he were about to place himself under their banner, he had been induced, partly by the fear of persecution, to fall back into the ranks of their bitterest foes.

One of his enemies, at the time of which I am now writing, was the Prince of Carpi, a man of higher rank than Bedda, but not possessing the same power of doing mischief as that individual, who published two large works against Erasmus, in which he endeavoured to prove that he was neither a divine nor a theologian, and that to him was to be attributed the disorder everywhere prevalent. In the midst of his controversy with him, in the year 1527, he lost his old friend Froben, the printer. His loss affected him deeply. He seems to have always anticipated his wants, and to have

* Burigni's "Life," vol. i. p. 512.

never been better pleased than when he had surprised him with some token of his kindness and liberality. He eulogizes him as one who had conferred a service on literature by printing books remarkable for their large type and their freedom from error, forming a perfect contrast in these respects to the works of printers even at Venice and Rome; as one too who esteemed no labour too great to be undergone in bringing before the public some good author, whose works were calculated to promote the onward march of religious, moral, or literary improvement.*

In the early part of 1528 Erasmus published a treatise on the right pronounciation of Latin and Greek,† in which he shows, with great learning, that the methods usually adopted were incorrect. The mode which he recommends, though contrary to our own, is considered by many to rest upon right principles. This was accompanied by a remarkable work called "Ciceronianus,"‡ which showed his scholarship to greater advantage than any by which it had been preceded. A sect called the Ciceronians had risen up at the close of the preceding century, when Erasmus was a boy, who tied themselves down to a servile imitation of Cicero. They would use no word nor phrase which was not to be found in the works of the illustrious Roman. Erasmus ridicules them in the work before us. Nosoponus, the Ciceronian, is introduced, arguing with two friends, who, with the most delightful irony, express their approbation of his views, and gently dispute with him, hoping to cure him of his madness. This individual carries his admiration of Cicero so far, that he has read no book but Cicero for seven years; keeps three or four volumes of an enormous size, in which he has marked down the different senses in which Cicero used his words, as well as the feet with which he began or closed his sentences,

* Op. tom. iii. ep. 922, edit. Lugd.

† Ibid. tom. i. p. 913.

‡ Ibid. p. 973.

seals his letters with Cicero's head, and has only Cicero's bust in his library. Erasmus tells a story in this work of the imposition practised upon the Ciceronians by some wits of this time. They attached the name of a German to a passage taken from Cicero, and showed it to them. The latter ridiculed it very much, and declared that it was barbarous. They then produced something written only the day before, which they declared to have been composed by Cicero, pretending that they had found it in a very old library. Immediately they kissed it, and adored those divine and inimitable words of Cicero. He describes this sect also in a letter to a friend.* They could not endure to see the name of Christ in polite literature, "as if nothing were elegant which had not a heathen origin. Their opinion was that the words 'Jupiter Optimus Maximus,' have a more agreeable sound than 'Jesus Christus redemptor mundi;' and 'Patres conscripti' than 'Sancti apostoli.' . . . These men account it more disgraceful not to be a Ciceronian than not to be a Christian, just as though, if Cicero were now alive, he would write on Christian subjects in the same manner as in the age in which he lived. What is the meaning of this detestable praise of Cicero? I will tell you in a few words, but as it were in a whisper. It is a mere pretext for the revival of Paganism, which is dearer to them than the glory of Christ." Here again he shows his opposition to the new Paganism already referred to, which in Italy accompanied the revival of classical studies.† The truth was, that Erasmus thought, as he has shown in the "Ciceronianus," that the determination to use only Ciceronian words was fatal to the introduction of Christian ideas into our works. He does not seem to have looked forward to the time when Christianity would have its own works in

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1021, edit. Lugd.

† See pp. 153, 154.

the languages of the different nations of Europe. He admired, indeed, Cicero, as an elegant writer; but still he thought it possible to write, as he has said in the letter just referred to, in a manner more expressive and solid, but not so lax and wordy. So far from being able to give a polish to what he had written, often he was not able, as he informs us, to read it a second time. The Ciceronians often spent three weeks or a month over a work, and *that* not a very long one, whereas he had often to finish a whole book in a single day. Yet he has obtained this commendation from a competent judge: "His style is natural and unaffected, and excellently adapted to every subject upon which he undertakes to write. The learned Dr. Worthington, speaking of the homely style of Thomas à Kempis, says that the Latin of that age was not so polished and restored to its purity and splendour, as it was afterwards by the stupendous diligence, and the unwearied labours of the incomparable Erasmus."*

Few works produced a greater revolution in the literary world, or exposed the author to more abuse, than the "Ciceronianus." The great point was whether Erasmus was right in asserting that the Ciceronians attached too much value to Cicero. A more unimportant one cannot well be imagined; and yet if Erasmus had been guilty of the greatest crimes and enormities, he could not have been assailed in more abusive language than by Scaliger. He described him as a drunkard, a hangman, a parricide, a monster, a new Porphyry, a Luther, and an infidel. All this abuse preyed very much upon his mind. He thought that Scaliger had been urged by others to write against him, and made his conjectures known to the world. Thus he exposed himself to new troubles. Scaliger thought himself unjustly accused, and attacked him with greater violence; but uni-

* Knight's "Life," p. 202.

versal indignation was expressed by the learned of all nations on account of his unjustifiable conduct. At length he was induced to address an apologetic letter to Erasmus, who accepted the apology just before his death.

The following extract from Gibbon's works with reference to this subject, may be interesting to the reader :—*
 "The object of this dialogue is to attack some blind admirers and copiers of Tully's style. In this attack he employed every arm both of argument and pleasantry. It may be divided into three parts. In the first Nosoponus, the Ciceronian, is introduced. His excessive devotion to Cicero, his three indices, his never writing except in the dead silence of the night, his employing months on a few lines, his religious concern about words, and his total indifference as to the sense, are highly and truly comic. In the second part Erasmus appears under the name of Bulephorus, and entering into great detail establishes victoriously that Cicero, though worthy of our imitation, is not over-worthy of it ; that so servile an attachment to any author destroys all originality of genius, and produces a set of tame writers, who will copy the faults, but who will never attain the perfection of the great model ; and that, finally, we should endeavour to speak as Cicero would do, if he had lived at the present time."

Erasmus had been for some time uneasy at Basle. In a letter to a friend, in 1527, he says that he meditates flight, but knows not where to go.† He was often appealed to by the Reformers among whom he lived, and he was afraid of being led to use expressions which might be considered heretical by the Roman Catholic party. At the same time he was unwilling to leave a city where he had many friends, where he could have his books printed at an excellent

* Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, vol. v. p. 259.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 636, edit. Bas.

printing-press, and where he was out of the way of his monkish persecutors.

At the end of April, 1529, however, on the legal establishment of the Reformation in Basle, not without opposition, which was overawed by the firmness of the senate, he took his departure for Friburg, in Brisgau, in the territories of Ferdinand of Austria. The magistrates and ministers of religion at Basle, though Protestants, sensible of the honour which their city derived from his residence among them, endeavoured to induce him to alter his determination ; but, with his usual timidity, he would not comply with their request, because he was afraid that the Romanists would accuse him of collusion with the Protestants, and of having been instrumental in securing the predominance of the latter religion in the city. King Ferdinand had given him a passport, and had invited him to his court. In one of the visits which he paid to Friburg, in February and March, 1529, before he finally took up his abode in the city, he had a most gratifying reception.* The magistrates, the nobility, and the University went forth to meet him, paying him high compliments, and calling him the supporter and protector of literature. The magistrates gave him a cup, elegantly wrought ; the College, a girdle embroidered with gold, and not inferior to the cup ; and, when he departed, some gentlemen accompanied him back to the gates of Basle. All the expenses of his journey were defrayed. He dwelt at first in a house which had been inhabited by Ferdinand, uncle to Charles V. ; but, as this proved too large for him, he purchased another, in 1531, which he repaired, or rebuilt at a great expense. He gives the following amusing account of his vexations, in a letter to a friend.† “If any one were to tell you that Erasmus, now nearly seventy years old, had

* Burigni, vol. i. p. 450.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 1200, edit. Lugd.

married, would you not mark yourself at least half-a-dozen times with the sign of the cross? I know well that you would do so, and with reason. But now I have done something which gives me equal trouble and vexation, and is equally uncongenial to my pursuits and inclinations. I have bought a house which is well spoken of, indeed, but which has cost me much. Who would despair of seeing the rivers flowing back to their sources, when they heard that Erasmus, who had hitherto made literary ease the great object of his life, had become a bargainer, a buyer, a contractor, a builder, and instead of conversing with the muses, has dealings with workmen, carpenters, ironmongers, stonemasons, glaziers?"

Though Erasmus never joined the Reformers, yet he had, by his writings, led others to cast in their lot with them, who afterwards gave very plain proof of the reality of their religion, by being faithful unto death to their Divine and adorable Redeemer. This was the case, amongst others, with John à Lasco, a nobleman of Poland, who lived and boarded with him for some time, at Basle.* But the sad history of Louis de Berquin, affords the most striking confirmation of the truth of our assertion. He was a gentleman from Artois, and had resided for some time at the Court of Francis I. To use the words of Erasmus, "the purity of his life, his wonderful devotedness to his friends, his liberality to the poor,"† and as we learn from another source of information, "his great erudition,"‡ served to distinguish him in a remarkable manner from the rest of the nobility. He was also, as we learn again from the same letter of Erasmus, conspicuous for his "strict observance of the fasts, feasts, and masses of the Church of Rome, and he had in the

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 379. † Ibid. p. 476.

‡ Guillard, "Hist. de François I^{er}."

first instance a great horror of heresy." We might therefore naturally suppose that he would be most unlikely to separate from her communion. But he utterly abhorred that ecclesiastical tyranny of which Erasmus supposed Bedda to be the incarnation, when he said "I am fighting with the ecclesiastics, or rather with the Beddaics, for in Bedda alone there are 3000 monks."* He could not, as Erasmus says, "even wish to be guilty of an act of injustice himself, and could not therefore endure the perpetration of it by others." Thus the violence and the unjust proceedings of Bedda inflamed him with indignation. In opposing his tyranny he was led to inquire after truth. While he was in this state of mind he met with some tracts of Erasmus, as his "Praise of Marriage," his "Christian Soldier's Manual," and his "Complaint of Peace," which he translated into French. As Berquin had declared himself to be a decided enemy of the monkish tyrants, Bedda sent Erasmus word that the translation might injure his character. The timid scholar, however, replied that it was undertaken without his consent, and that he ought to be judged by his own works, as he had published them, and not by the versions of others.† He also sent a special messenger to Berquin with a letter, in which he told him that though he had published his books with a good intention, yet he had brought an odium upon him, and, with his usual timidity, recommended him to avoid all contests with the divines, because religious controversy was carried on with so much acrimony that it was not safe to meddle with it.‡

But the ardour of Berquin in the inquiry after truth was unquenched and unquenchable. He felt a desire to become acquainted with the Holy Scriptures loved by the very men whom Bedda and his satellites were labouring to exterminate.

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 422. † Op. tom. iii. p. 866, edit. Lugd.

‡ Ibid., p. 884.

Soon he came to know experimentally the life-giving power of those words of wisdom and truth which are able to make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Then he became anxious to pour a flood of light on his fellow-countrymen. Having gained additional courage by the prayerful study of the Sacred Scriptures, he boldly published some epigrams against the "Sorbonne hornets," and openly charged them with impiety. Now also he circulated through France, not only the writings of Erasmus, but also those of Luther and Melancthon, and maintained, as we learn from the letter of the first describing his death, from which I shall presently give an extract, that the Sacred Scriptures should be translated into the vulgar tongue, and disseminated among the people. He also held, as we learn from the same letter, that it is improper "to call on the Virgin Mary instead of the Holy Ghost, and to describe her as the source of all grace." He finds fault also with the custom of "calling her our hope and our life, when such titles belong only to the Son of God." A reference to the account of his visit to Walsingham, from which it appears very plainly that Erasmus is not to be considered as a devout worshipper of the Virgin,* as well as to that noble passage in which he expresses his wish that "the husbandman should sing some of the verses at his plough-tail, that the weaver should sing them while throwing his shuttle, and that the traveller should beguile a tedious journey with the stories contained in them,"† shows very plainly that Berquin was indebted to him for the opinions here ascribed to him.

Bedda, who shrank from attacking Berquin while he assailed him with his wit, because he was one of the gentlemen of the Court, thought that he might safely do so when he obtained undoubted evidence that he was propagating through France those truths which were opposed to his own

* See pp. 111—124.

† See p. 177.

prejudices, and distasteful to his own inclinations. Accordingly one day, when he was seated in his study, Bedda entered with his emissaries, armed with a warrant of search issued by the Parliament, and carried off the books, the unquestionable proofs of his heresy, which were scattered around him. These were submitted by order of the Parliament to the Theological Faculty, and having been reported to be heretical, were consigned to the flames.

Berquin himself was now summoned before that formidable body, and was ordered to recant. But he was not faint-hearted nor irresolute. He displayed the same Christian heroism as those martyrs and confessors who, by their constancy even unto death, have shed an undying glory on the annals of Christianity. He showed the reality of his religion by answering each threat of condign punishment with the expression of a firmer determination to hold to the end his religious opinions. To use the words of Erasmus, "Berquin somewhat resembled the palm-tree ; he rose again, and displayed a proud and towering spirit against all who sought to frighten him."* But the Parliament was determined, if possible, to treat him with merciless rigour. He was first of all sent to their own prison, and afterwards, having been handed over to the Bishop of Paris, was transferred to the prison of the ecclesiastical court. But Bedda was not permitted at this time to work his will upon Berquin. The nobility exclaimed that he was, by this imprisonment, infringing the privileges of their order, and that in condemning the worship of the Virgin, Berquin was only following the example of Erasmus and many others. Francis I. was now induced to interpose on his behalf. A messenger from the king appeared before his prison, charged with an order for his release, which his persecutors were obliged to obey. The King gained a

* D'Aubigné's Hist. vol. ii. p. 567.

victory over the Church, beating down her sword as it was about to be sheathed in the body of this faithful servant of his Divine Master.

Berquin now began to entertain the confident expectation that France might be induced to shake off the yoke of the Pope. He determined that no effort on his part should be wanting to effect her emancipation. We find him now writing to Erasmus, to whom he was personally unknown, and expressing a hope that he would aid him in the accomplishment of his object. But he had not yet learnt that, on account of his timidity and indecision of character, he was the very worst person to whom he could have applied for aid in fighting his battles. The advice which the philosopher gave him, so far from encouraging him, was calculated to damp his ardour in the prosecution of his high and holy enterprise. "Remember," he said, "not to provoke the wasps, and peaceably enjoy your own studies. Above all, do not mix me up with your affairs, for this would be of no service to you or to me."*

Berquin, however, was not easily daunted. Though a thousand hostile forms thronged the path which he was pursuing, he was still prepared to march forward. He acted in the spirit of that noble declaration of St. Paul, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus?"† If his religion had not been real, he would now have violated his oath of fealty to the King of Kings. But he was supported by that hidden strength which God always supplies to His servants in seasons of difficulty and danger. The disappointment which he experienced in Erasmus, who, after having by his writings led him to engage in this struggle,

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1208, B. edit. Lugd.

† Acts xxi. 13.

now showed, by the cowardly advice which he gave him, that he wished to recede from the opinions which he had formerly expressed, served to impress him with a deeper conviction that he ought to cease altogether from man, and that he ought to lean upon that Almighty arm which alone could uphold him. He now lost no opportunity of assailing the monks, and exposing their hypocrisy. This was the real cause of their enmity to him. He also, as we learn from a letter to John à Lasco, continued to translate and to propagate the writings of Erasmus, "with a free spirit and honest design." To these were added those of Luther, and the "Common Places" of Melancthon. This circulation of Protestant books was in fact his great offence in the opinion of Bedda and his associates; but they did not dare in the first instance to bring it prominently forward, because they knew that the King was a great patron of literature. We find that Bedda had influence enough with the Parliament at the time of the captivity of Francis I., after the battle of Pavia, to induce the members of that body again to cast him into prison. In vain was he urged by many to recant; he declared that he would not yield on a single point. It seemed then as if there were no alternative but that he should expiate his offence at the stake.

But now Margaret of Valois, the sister of Francis I., came to his aid. She had learnt the opinions of the Reformers from their works, which were now being circulated through France. Her beautiful religious poetry shows that she was deeply grieved on account of the manner in which she had treated the scandals of the age in which she lived. The heavenly plant at this time flourished and expanded amid the sickly and tainted atmosphere of a Court. She was now full of alarm about Berquin. She therefore wrote to her brother to solicit his pardon. Erasmus speaks of his danger, as well as of the result of her ap-

plication on his behalf in the letter to John à Lasco already referred to. "His translation of my writings has been profitable neither to him nor to me. Twice he was in danger of losing his life by it, and he would certainly have perished by the mercy of the monks, if the King had not rescued him." On his return to Paris, after his captivity, he issued an order for Berquin's release.

After this time he continued at Paris for three years, till 1529, disseminating the writings of Erasmus. Unfortunately the profane mutilation of a statue exasperated Francis. The sad tragedy which followed shall be described in the words of Erasmus.* "I have heard that the power of passing sentence on him was given to twelve chosen judges. It was that his books should be burnt; that he should be called upon to abjure; that his tongue should be pierced; and that he should be imprisoned for life. On hearing this sentence, which was severe beyond his expectation, he appealed to the King and the Pope. The judges, enraged at this announcement, told him that as he would not submit to their sentence, he should never again be able to appeal to any one. The next day they ordered him to be committed to the flames. It is said that the principal charge against him was that he had stated in his writings, contrary to the decree of Parliament, that it was desirable, with a view to the advancement of true religion, that the Bible should be translated into the vulgar tongue, and should be read by the people. Six hundred soldiers were ordered out to prevent a tumult. Neither his look nor his manner indicated the least discomposure. He seemed like one in his library, absorbed in his studies, or in a church, meditating on heavenly things. Not even when the executioner with a harsh voice proclaimed his crime and his punishment, did he seem to lose

* Letter to a friend, translated from a note in Jortin, vol. i. p. 476.

any of his firmness. When he was told to come down from the carriage, he obeyed without the least hesitation. He did not show any of that audacity or ferocity which wickedness sometimes engenders in malefactors. The calmness of his countenance indicated a self-approving conscience. Before his death he made an address to the people. No one, however, could hear a word of it on account of the loud groans of the soldiers. While he was being suffocated by the smoke, no one in the crowd called out the name of Jesus, as is usually done in the case even of parricides and profane wretches. The reason was that those men who are everywhere, and have great influence with simple and ignorant people, had turned the minds of all against him. A certain Franciscan asked him in his dying moments whether he recanted. This man declares that he did so, and asserts that he has not the least doubt that his soul departed in peace. But I do not believe him. You have now heard the account of the death of Berquin, for which he seems to have been born. I cannot give an opinion on the cause of his death, because it is altogether unknown to me. I grieve for him if he has not deserved punishment. If he has deserved it, I grieve the more. For it is better that an innocent man should die, than one who is guilty. I have not the least doubt that he had persuaded himself that he was in the right. This persuasion would account for his calm look."

We cannot fail to observe the lamentable coldness of this letter. We should have thought that he would have been full of righteous indignation against his persecutors, especially when we remember that he, by his writings, had been greatly instrumental in bringing him to the stake. We find him, however, not only concealing the share which he had in his death, but even expressing himself thus in a letter to

a friend, Agrippa:* “I often endeavoured to persuade him to be careful to disentangle himself from that matter; but he deluded himself with the expectation of victory. If you cannot hope to avoid exposing yourself to the dangers of war, take care that you fight from a tower, and do not come to close quarters. Especially be careful not to mix me up with this business. I asked Berquin to give me the same promise; but he was deceived, because he thought more of his own courage than of my advice. You see how the matter has ended. There would not have been the least danger if he had listened to me. I often told him that the divines and the monks could not be conquered, even if he had a better cause than St. Paul.” Once, indeed, Erasmus had had the courage to condemn the sacrifice of two Augustinian monks whom Egmont and Hochstrat caused to be burnt at Brussels, and foretold that “the blood of the martyrs would be the seed” of the Lutheran church.† But since that time he had been gradually receding farther and farther from the position which he occupied. Now the trumpet gives an uncertain sound. He speaks with a hesitating utterance. He fears that he shall involve himself in difficulty and danger by making common cause with one against whom the Church of Rome had fulminated her anathemas; thus presenting a remarkable contrast to one whom he has described in the preceding letter as exhibiting a holy tranquillity, even when death was approaching in his most forbidding form, heralded by the dark executioners of his mandates.

I regret to say that soon after this time Erasmus published an “Apology,” the opinions expressed in which are not very creditable to him. It is called—“A Letter against certain Professors of the Gospel, falsely so named.”‡ The

* Jortin’s “Life,” vol. ii. p. 470.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 325.

‡ Op. tom. x. p. 1573, edit. Lugd.

person to whom it was addressed was Gerardus Noviomagus, or Geldenhaur, a zealous Lutheran, who was originally one of his intimate friends. Inflamed with anger against Erasmus because he had once been inclined to that party, and had not only abandoned it, but also contributed to exasperate the Roman Catholics against it, he exposed his inconsistency in several publications, and in particular charged him with having maintained that it was unlawful to put heretics to death. Erasmus, afraid lest the persecuting princes whom he numbered amongst his patrons should imagine that he was condemning the atrocities which they were now constantly perpetrating, made an absurd distinction between different heretics, and said that he did not intend to restrain the civil magistrates from putting blasphemers to death. It was a fault, he said, to drag men to the fire for every error ; but it was wrong to contend that no heretic whatever ought to be put to death by the civil magistrate. He now brings against the Reformers various charges. He says that "the primitive Christians recommended their doctrine by mildness, and simplicity of manners, and by patience in bearing injuries, whereas the societies of the Reformers abounded with adulterers, drunkards, gamesters, and spendthrifts." In a strain of banter he charges them with having made Romanists more formidable than ever. "Formerly," he observes, "we might discuss various questions, as the power of the Pope, purgatory, &c.; now we must not open our mouths even on those great truths, the discussion of which tends to edification. We are compelled, too, to believe that a man can perform by himself meritorious works ; that he deserves eternal life by his good deeds ; that the Blessed Virgin can order the Son who reigns with the Father to listen to our prayers, and many other things which men of a pious mind cannot endure to hear. Formerly no one attacked you if you ate flesh in private ; now if from a regard to your health you taste even an egg in

Lent, you are dragged as a heretic to prison, and have to answer for your life. Formerly we might even spit at monks and divines ; but now you have given to these men so much power, that it is a capital offence to utter a word against them. Formerly the ordination of clerks protected them from the rigour of the civil tribunal ; now priests, as well as those who follow a mean trade for gain, are tortured, are beaten, are hanged, are beheaded, are burnt by the public executioner, without being degraded. Such are the auspicious circumstances in connection with the revival of your gospel. You yourselves can judge best what other evils are coming upon us."

All right-minded persons will be grieved when they find Erasmus writing in this tone. They cannot fail to pronounce a distinct and emphatic condemnation on that fear of man which led him to stifle his conscientious convictions, and to abstain from discussing and opposing dogmas which are condemned alike by reason and revelation. It is hard to believe, that with his latitudinarian views, he really held the opinion that it is lawful to put heretics to death ; and it was probably only his determination to retain, at any cost, the favour of his powerful patrons, that induced him so far to yield to the spirit of the age as to profess the doctrine. He seems to have forgotten that if he had been seized by the monks, he might have been judged out of his own mouth ; and that, unless he had recanted, he would have breathed out his soul in the burning fiery furnace amid the shouts and revilings of assembled multitudes.

The Protestant clergy of Strasburg made a reply to the charges of Erasmus. Upon reading it, he became very much embittered against the Reformers, and published an answer addressed to the brethren of Lower Germany, far more violent than the preceding "Apology."* "I

* Op. tom. x. p. 1589, edit. Lugd.

knew a person," he writes, "whom for more than ten years I loved as if he had been my own son. He seemed to have a good disposition ; but as soon as he had a small portion of the evangelical spirit, he began, contrary to all expectation, to be a good player at dice, a sitter up all night at cards, and a man of an elegant taste for bad women." He mentions another, "one of the heads of the gospel party, a man against whom I have never said a word, who, not content with wounding my character in conversation, has written a pamphlet against me, which he reads to his drinking companions!" "In matters of business," he adds, "I have found the gospellers more unfeeling, and less to be trusted than other people, and I am acquainted with some of the Roman Catholic bishops whose sanctity I prefer to that of a thousand of the new sectaries."

He concludes in the following manner : "Objections are made to the bad lives of the priests ; the tyranny of the Papal decrees is exaggerated ; the evil practices of the monks are exposed, and promises of liberty are made. This is the bait, but take care lest there be found lurking under it a steel-hook, which may entangle you, and prove your destruction. What greater folly than to show your hatred to priests and wicked monks in such a manner as to render them no better, and to make yourselves worse than they are ! For there is no sin worse than heresy and schism. Be it granted that luxury, lewdness, ambition, avarice, and every other crime, may all be found in one single priest ; heresy is, however, worse than all this aggregate of vices. . . . In our anger against ecclesiastics let us never forget that they are such. . . . Let Christ make a reform through the medium of Charles V., an Emperor eminent for his power, eminent for his clemency, and equally eminent for his religion. The co-operation of the German princes may be depended on ; and there are many

circumstances which induce us to entertain a good hope that the thoughts of the Pope are turned the same way. . . . No reformation of the Church will be successful which does not begin with our rulers. The Pope alone, with the Emperor, can effect it; and unless appearances deceive us, Christ has disposed their minds to this good work."

This extenuation of the wickedness of the clergy, and the tone of delight, instead of pity, in which he speaks of the sins of the Reformers, deserve the strongest condemnation. It is manifest, when he brings railing accusations against the latter, that he could not help feeling that many of the Romanists were the slaves of every vice. He admits that this was the case in a letter to be given immediately. I regret to say that some of the Reformers answered to the description of them here given. But many, as Erasmus knew, were strict in their fulfilment of every social and relative obligation. The former inflicted a great injury on the cause of the Reformation. Erasmus, amongst others, was led to ask himself what could be the value of their principles, when their practice was diametrically opposed to the plainest precepts of the Gospel. Thus the Saviour was wounded in the house of His friends. Thus some, like Erasmus, not only refused to become standard bearers, or to enlist in the army of the Reformers, but even were led to labour to raze to its foundation the fabric of Protestantism.

We might suppose from the preceding letter that Erasmus had a very high opinion of the Pope and the Emperor. But only six months afterwards he contradicts the opinions here expressed. He wrote to Matthias Kretzer to this effect.* "That the Emperor was very angry, and that there were

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1018, edit. Bas.

those who were throwing oil into the fire ;* that some who wore purple gowns did much mischief by their conduct, for though they must be well aware that the luxury and pride of the clergy had been the chief cause of the present dissensions, yet they lived in incredible pomp, revelling and sometimes playing at dice all night, and not even taking care to keep their evil conduct from the knowledge of the world ; that the haughtiness, not to say the tyranny, of the ecclesiastics, was increasing ; their wealth and luxury were also increasing, and there was not the least diminution of their thirst after these things. It was not for him," Erasmus said, "to judge the Pope, but those who came from Italy told things which he was grieved to hear. How cruelly had he treated Florence ! As far as he could see, the Pope, by the help of the princes, and by augmenting the number of his cardinals, was endeavouring to prevent every attempt at reformation. And what was all this but to provoke God more and more ?"

A symbolical representation, exhibited before Charles V. and his brother Ferdinand, at Augsburg, in 1530, at the time when the Lutherans presented their celebrated confession of faith to the Diet assembled in that city, gives so just a view of the character and motives of Erasmus, as well as of the other actors in the drama, that I shall not scruple to bring it before the notice of my readers. Erasmus had been summoned to the Diet, but he could not attend it on account of his health. He was glad of the excuse, for he says that he could not have come there but at the risk of his life.† He wrote an answer to Cardinal Campeggio to protest against settling questions of doctrine by the sword.‡ The following is the account of the repre-

* He here refers to the Pope, who, with the aid of the Emperor, was endeavouring to crush the Reformers. Jortin, vol. i. p. 506.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 1152, edit. Lugd. ‡ Ibid. p. 1117.

sentation.* “As the princes were at table, some persons offered to act a small comedy for the entertainment of the company. They were ordered to begin; when first entered a man in the dress of a doctor, who brought a large quantity of small wood, of straight and crooked billets, and laid it on the middle of the hearth, and retired. On his back was written the name of Reuchlin. When this actor went off another entered, apparelled also like a doctor, who attempted to make faggots of the wood, and to fit the crooked to the straight; but having laboured long to no purpose, he went away out of humour, and shaking his head. On his back appeared the name of Erasmus. A third, dressed like an Augustinian monk, came in, with a chafing dish full of fire, gathered up the crooked wood, put it on the fire, and blew till he made it burn, having on his frock the name of Luther. A fourth entered, dressed like the Emperor, who, seeing the crooked wood all on fire, seemed much concerned, and in order to put it out, drew his sword and poked the fire with it, which only made it burn brisker. On his back was written the name of Charles V. Lastly, a fifth entered in his pontifical habit and triple crown, who seemed extremely surprised to see the crooked billets all on fire, and by his countenance and attitude betrayed excessive grief. Then, looking out on every side to see if he could find any water to extinguish the flames, he cast his eyes on two bottles in a corner of the room, one of which was full of oil, and the other of water, and in his hurry he unfortunately seized on the oil and poured it on the fire, which made it blaze so violently, that he was forced to walk off. On his back was written Leo X.”

“This little farce,” as Jortin observes, “wanted no com-

* Jortin’s “Life,” vol. i. p. 585.

mentary ; but if the actors had taken it into their heads to represent the whole conduct of Erasmus, they should have introduced him a second time, and have represented him as constrained by the menaces of Leo X., to take up the straight wood and burn it along with the crooked."

CHAPTER XII.

LOSS OF FRIENDS BY DEATH.—LAST YEARS.—CHARACTER.
(A.D. 1530-1536.)

THE latter part of the life of Erasmus which I have now described, was embittered by the reflection that he had lost the esteem and confidence of both the contending parties. On the one hand, he could not, by his recantation, satisfy the Roman Catholics, who declared that he had, by his publications, inflicted great injury on the Church. A doctor at Constance kept his picture for no other purpose than that when he passed it he might spit upon it, and on being asked why he treated him with this contempt, answered that Erasmus was the cause of all the mischief in the world. His enemies did not hesitate to propagate lies respecting him. One said that he had died of a terrible distemper, another, that he had been at his funeral, another, that his books and pictures had been burnt publicly at Rome. They called him also Errasmus, as made up of errors ; Erasinus, abasino ; a monster, and therefore Behemoth.* It appears from a letter of Henry VIII. to him, in 1528, already referred to, in which he invited him to return to his kingdom, "that he was in danger of his life from them, and that he was nowhere safe from their malice." Convinced

* Knight's "Life," p. 328.

that learning was fatal to their power over the people, they represented Erasmus, the great promoter of its revival, and Luther, as equally enemies to the Church, hoping that they would be involved in the same ruin. We often find him in his letters declaring, in answer to them, that the cause of literature had no connection with Lutheranism. On the other hand, the Protestants bitterly accused him, and asserted, not without some appearance of reason, that if he had been true to his convictions, and had been less timid, his wonderful reputation would have given to the Reformers the same influence with the learned and refined, which they had secured for themselves with the multitude, so that every one on this side of the Alps would have cast off the usurped dominion of the Roman Pontiff.

We can easily imagine that Erasmus suffered severely from this opposition. He loved popularity, and yet he was more abused than any one in Europe. He loved peace ; and yet he had the din of angry controversy constantly sounding in his ears. He now went heavily all the day in the bitterness of his soul. A dense and dismal darkness brooded over his spirit. "In the morning he said, Would God it were even ! and at even he said, Would God it were morning !" He no longer found any pleasure in that converse with the Muses which originally constituted one of the principal sources of his happiness. His wan and wasted countenance, his dejected air, his sleepless nights, his neglect of his daily food, his downcast look, the longing for death which he often expressed to his friends, afforded sad evidence that an anguish had taken possession of his soul, which surpasses all description. How different would have been the case if he had sought God's grace to enable him to conquer that "fear of man which bringeth a snare," and to act up to his conscientious convictions ! He would then have possessed a holy serenity of soul which would have formed a strange

contrast to the storm which was raging furiously around him. The ties by which he was bound to the high and mighty ones of the earth, to the friends of his youth, and to the companions of his riper years, might have been severed, but not so those ties by which he was united to "God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant." He would not have been left desolate; Christ Himself would have been an "exceeding joy" to him in the midst of his tribulation. When abandoned by all whose friendship and patronage he had hitherto prized so highly, he would have been sustained by the sympathy of his Almighty Saviour; he would have been cheered by the assurance that He would support him by His presence in his passage through this world of trial and temptation, and that He would at length vindicate his cause before an assembled universe.

Erasmus was now often painfully reminded of that solemn hour when the "dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." He now saw his friends and patrons, the objects of his heart's best affections, fleeting like leaves before the autumnal blast. In the first month of 1532, he lost his valued friend Pirckheimer. Then he was called upon to pay the tribute of a tear to the memory of his friend Warham. In 1532 "he came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season." We have already seen how much Erasmus was indebted to him for his patronage. On one occasion he says that he had received so much from Warham, that it would be scandalous to take more of him even if he should offer it. He had, as we have seen, saddled the living of Aldington with a payment of twenty pounds a year to him, to which he had added twenty pounds from his own private purse. Thus endowed, Erasmus had an income from

England alone equivalent to four hundred pounds a year in the present day.*

The following extracts from a letter addressed from Cambridge to Warham, and from another sent by the Archbishop in reply, will serve to show the footing of easy, yet respectful familiarity on which he stood with him. He has informed us elsewhere that Warham was wont to place himself on an equality with his guests, while by his manner he showed that no one was to take a liberty with him, or with any of his companions. The letters contain much wit and humour, though they are coarse, after the manner of the age.

“Your Erasmus has a dangerous and terrible fit of the stone, which has cast him into the hands of doctors and apothecaries, that is, of butchers and harpies. I am still in labour: I feel the pangs within me. . . . I think that this pain is owing to the drinking of beer, which for several days I have been forced to use instead of wine. These are the unhappy fruits of a war with France.”†

The Archbishop sent the following facetious reply: “I hope that you are purged of your gravel and stones, the rather because the Feast of the Purgation of the Virgin Mary is lately over. What mean these stones in your body? What is it you would build upon this rock? I cannot think that you design a noble house or any edifice of this kind. And therefore, since you have no occasion for your stones, pray part with them as soon as you can; and give any money to carry them off. I will gladly give money to bring them to my buildings. That you may do so the more easily, and not be wanting to yourself, I have sent you by a London goldsmith’s son thirty nobles, which I would have you change into ten legions, to help to drive

* Hook’s “Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury,” vol. i. p. 325.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 429, edit. Bas.

away the distemper. Gold is a good medicine, and has a great deal of virtue in it. Apply it to the recovery of your health, which I would be glad to purchase for you at a higher price. For I know that you have a great many excellent works to publish, which cannot be finished without health and strength.”*

The Archbishop had a very high opinion of Erasmus. He says in a letter to him, that he was very grateful to him for the immortality which he had conferred upon him ; for the mention of him in his works would secure for him “ an honour denied to the mightiest kings, and would perpetuate his name to the remotest generations.”†

Erasmus states in a letter to More, that though Warham had held the highest offices in Church and State, he had so little attended to his own advantage, that at the time of his death he had only left enough to pay his debts and funeral expenses. It is said that shortly before his death he asked his steward what money he had in his hands. On hearing that he had only thirty pounds, he cheerfully answered, “Satis viatici ad cœlum—” “It is enough to last me to heaven.” Erasmus, in the same letter, states that his straitened circumstances were the reason that he had not received so much from him towards the close of his life, as he had in the earlier part of it ; and mentions also that Archbishop Cranmer had told him that he should never miss his former great patron.‡

The following extracts from his works show that Erasmus thought very highly of the Archbishop. Writing to the Abbot of St. Bertin, he says : “ Of those who are kind to me, I give the first place to Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury. What genius, what copiousness, what vivacity ! What facility in the most complicated discussions !

* Op. tom. iii. p. 275, edit. Bas.

† Ibid. p. 76.

‡ Knight's “Life,” p. 234.

What erudition, what politeness ! From Warham none ever parted in sorrow. His behaviour would do honour to a monarch. With all these qualities, how great is his humility ! how edifying his modesty ! He alone is ignorant of his eminence. No one is more faithful or consistent in friendship. In fine he is a true Primate, not only in rank, but in every kind of merit.*

He thus speaks of him in his "Ecclesiastes," which, as we shall see presently, was published after the Archbishop's death, so that the eulogium which he here pronounces upon him, could not have been prompted by the hope of reward.†

"He was raised to be the head of the Church of Canterbury, which ranks foremost in dignity in that island. To this charge, exceedingly burdensome in itself, was added another still more so. He was obliged to undertake the office of Chancellor, which indeed, with the English, is truly royal. That office he filled with so much skill for many years, that you would have supposed that he was born for that very business, and held no other charge. But at the same time he was so vigilant and attentive in matters relating to religion and his ecclesiastical functions, that you would have imagined that he was engaged in no external concerns. He found sufficient time to discharge religiously the solemn duties of prayer, to perform mass almost daily, to be present besides at two or three services, to hear causes, to receive embassies, to advise the king if anything of importance had arisen in Court, to visit his churches wherever his presence was required, to receive his guests, often amounting to 200 ; and lastly his leisure was given to reading. For occupations so various he found one life sufficient, no part of which he bestowed on hunting, none on dice, none on empty talk, none on luxury or pleasure. Though he had sometimes bishops, dukes, earls, as his guests, yet

* Op. tom. iii. p. 118, edit. Lugd.

† Op. tom. v. p. 641, edit. Bas.

dinner was always finished in the space of an hour. He took the smallest quantity of food ; and, with the kindness of his looks, and the cheerfulness of his discourse, enlivened the whole table. If he had no company for supper, he spent the time of supper either in prayer or reading. He was pleased with the free jests of his friends, but shrank from detraction as any one would do from a serpent. Thus this excellent man made those days always long, of the shortness of which so many complain."

This picture of Warham is too highly coloured. Gratitude for benefits conferred, no doubt led Erasmus to exaggerate his merits. He was an easy man, anxious during the latter part of his life to live quietly, and to enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* of the Archbishopric. His abilities were certainly remarkable ; but he wanted that genius which enables a man by intuition to see which is the right course to pursue in circumstances of peculiar difficulty and perplexity. In all probability he would have occupied a higher place in the estimation of posterity, if the transcendent abilities of Wolsey had not cast him into the shade. He was a great friend to the new learning, and extended his patronage to all who, like Erasmus, endeavoured to advance it. The learned men who were his guests in his manor houses, always found him ready to give and to receive information. He was certainly more superstitious than Erasmus. He was more inclined also to mysticism than scholasticism. To a certain extent he was a reformer ; but he aimed at the reformation of the clergy, instead of beginning as he ought to have begun, with the reformation of the Church. Dean Colet was appointed by him as the preacher before convocation in 1512, in order that he might, as the first step to a reformation, expose to the public view their avarice, their worldly mindedness, their carnal ease, and their self-indulgence. Both he and

Erasmus thought that a reformation could be effected only by unfolding the meaning of the Bible in a new and improved translation to the leading men of the day, in order that they might by degrees discover and correct the errors in doctrine and practice which he firmly believed to exist. But Warham differed from him in thinking that a knowledge of the Scriptures should not, for the present at least, be universally diffused, for he imagined that the consequence of constituting the people judges of the reformation required, would be that they would be carried away by revolutionary fanaticism, and would be guilty of the wildest excesses, which would be prejudicial to the best interests of human society. Hence, while he strongly approved of Erasmus's translation into Latin, which was intended only for the learned, he disapproved of, and sought to suppress Tyndal's translation designed to enable his fellow-countrymen to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. He thought that the reformation should be carried on gradually by persons in authority ; and wished the reading of the Word of God to be confined to a few who would use it for devotional purposes, not as a means of enabling them to sit in judgment on the teaching of the "infallible" doctors of the Church.

I admit the general accuracy of the character given by Erasmus, and I may add that he was generous in his donations to needy friends ; and that he often rewarded those who flattered him, or rendered to him personal services. I must state also that he was economical ; and that he required a strict account from his retinue of the most trifling expenditure. With all his desire for reform, he was still a Romanist. He denied, as I have said, the right of *all* the people to read, and to exercise their private judgment in the interpretation of Holy Scripture, the fundamental doctrine of Protestantism ;

he accepted the *opus operatum* to its fullest extent, and he believed in the doctrine of purgatory, for he became the Papal collector of tolls in this country in the matter of indulgences. Fuller, no doubt, speaks the truth when he calls him "a still and silent persecutor of poor Christians," for, as Fox informs us, in the year 1511 he caused one John Brown of Ashford in Kent to be cruelly tortured by having his bare feet placed on burning coals till they were burnt to the bones, and then to be committed to the flames because he refused to recant;* and afterwards he compelled six men at Knowle to do penance, and to go in procession carrying a faggot to show that they had incurred the highest penalty of the law, for asserting what all Protestants ought to maintain, that confession to a priest is unnecessary, and that the consecrated elements are not the body and blood of Christ, but material bread and wine.† We know also that he was an enemy to the Reformers, for he drew up, and persuaded the King to issue a proclamation, enjoining his lords spiritual and temporal and all who held high office to assist in suppressing publications and in silencing preachers "who inculcate anything contrary to the determination of the Catholic faith, and the definitions of Holy Church."‡

We doubt not that Warham's death was the means of directing the thoughts of Erasmus to the hour which, he felt, could not be far distant, when his own dilapidated tabernacle should fall into ruins. We learn that he was engaged in meditation on the subject of preparation for death, from a letter written in 1533, from Friburg to

* Fox's "History of Christian Martyrdom," with Notes by Rev. J. Milner. New edition, London, 1838, vol. i. p. 479.

† Hook's "Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury," vol. i, new series, p. 281.

‡ Ibid, p. 340.

Thomas, Lord Viscount Rochford, formerly Sir Thomas Boleyn, and afterwards, when his unfortunate daughter became the King's consort, Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond. Erasmus had previously, in compliance with his request, written an exposition of the twenty-second Psalm, which he dedicated to him.* He mentions him as a remarkable instance of a man who, though rich, nobly descended, connected with royalty, surrounded with glittering vanities, and breathing the tainted atmosphere of a court, could yet rise to his high destinies, seek the imperishable riches, and become a candidate for the unfading crown.

Erasmus told him that he had himself derived much benefit from the preparation of this little work. He had further, in compliance with his request, drawn up an exposition of the Apostles' creed, for the use of those who were not sufficiently acquainted with the first principles of Christianity. And now he asked Erasmus to engage on a third work on "Preparation for Death."† The latter addresses him in a dedicatory epistle, as a man more illustrious for his piety than for the ornamental appendages which fortune had conferred upon him. He then refers to the subject just mentioned; "This," he says, "is the last act of human life, as of a play; upon it depends our eternal happiness or misery. This is the last conflict with the enemy, from which the soldier of Christ may expect an everlasting triumph, if he should prove a conqueror; everlasting shame if he should be cast down in the warfare. I was fully occupied with this subject, when your urgent request came to me, as a sort of spur to a running man. I was then meditating on it for my own benefit. Your pious zeal, however, will be the means of making the fruit of my meditation profitable to many. . . . I pray that the God of grace may

* Op. tom. v. p. 263, edit. Bas.

† Ibid. p. 1081.

give a blessing to your prayers, and to my labours." We trust that this last prayer was answered. Erasmus and his noble friend would need heavenly consolations to support them, not only afterwards, in the hour of their departure, but also previously when they heard, the one, that the heads of his daughter, Anne Boleyn, and of his son George, Lord Rochford,—the other, that the heads of his friends More and Fisher, in obedience to the mandate of Henry, had rolled on the scaffold.

These two eminent men perished by the stroke of the executioner, within a few days of each other, in 1535. Their offence was the same. They were quite willing to swear to the Act which secured the succession to the children of Anne Boleyn, but not to its preamble, which maintained the lawfulness of the divorce. Lord Mountjoy had died the year before. Thus the ruthless hand of death separated Erasmus nearly at the same time from four men with whom his heart's best affections were entwined. He makes a touching allusion to their death, in the treatise called "*Ecclesiastes*."*—"We lament the loss of our merchandise in a shipwreck. What merchandise, however, is so precious as to admit of comparison with a real friend? Surely then the present time has been very cruel to me, inasmuch as it has deprived me of greatly valued friends; first of all of William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, and lately of William Mountjoy, the Bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More, whose breast was whiter than snow, to whom in point of genius, England, though the parent of men of distinguished ability, never has produced and never will produce any one who bears the least resemblance."

More was indeed the light of his life, the very joy of his existence. We have seen the high eulogium which he pronounces upon him in his letter to Hutten. They had only

* *Op.* tom. v. p. 642, edit. Bas.

met occasionally, as I have said, in the course of the last eighteen years, when More paid a hurried visit to the Continent, but their correspondence had never ceased. The affection which he felt for him could not be lessened by time nor separation. Erasmus was not without his fears that the elevation of More to the high dignity of Lord Chancellor, after Wolsey, would prove fatal to him, because he knew that he was strongly opposed to the divorce of Queen Catherine. More, finding that his office involved him in many difficulties, had often urged the King to accept his resignation of the seals. At length he reluctantly consented to do so. More resigned in 1532, having held office for three years and a half. He was so delighted with having carried his point that he wrote to Erasmus to give him the welcome intelligence, and to inform him that he had returned to his beloved studies.* He added that he should consider his happiness complete if he could hope to have constant intercourse with a friend like himself before his departure. He also states that he had been obliged to resign his office and to live at ease, as his health had given way in consequence of intense application to public business; and adds that he could not undergo the same herculean labours as Erasmus himself,† at which he expresses his surprise, on account of the state of his health, and the troubles of various kinds to which he was exposed. Erasmus in reply said that he was rejoiced to hear that his friend had gone into retirement; but could not refrain from expressing his fear that the King was quite aware of the real reason for his resignation, and from adding that, to use the words of Homer, monarchs dissemble their indig-

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1073, edit. Bas.

† In Holbein's picture of him, to which reference will presently be made, there is written under his hand this inscription "Πόνοι Ἡράκλειοι."

nation till the opportunity of revenging themselves shall be afforded to them.*

Before the curtain falls after the last act of the tragedy, I must bring on the stage More in the bosom of his happy family. Erasmus had thus described them some years previously in a letter to Budæus.† “He has taken care that all of them should be trained from their tender years, first religiously, next in polite literature. More and I determined that they should show us what progress they had made in the latter. He told them all to write to me, and that they were to have no assistance in doing so. They were not to be supplied with the subject-matter, and no verbal corrections were to be made. . . . You will believe me when I say that I was never so much pleased in my life. There was nothing in the sense at all trifling or puerile. In their language you might at once see that they were improving daily. . . . You will see in this house no one idle, no one occupied about the trifles to which some females are devoted. They are reading the works of Livy, and have made so much progress that they can read authors of this description without explanation, unless they should happen to meet with a word which would give me, or those like me, some difficulty. His wife, who has more natural ability and experience than learning, with wonderful tact manages the whole party, prescribing to each of them her task, and requiring her to show how she has performed it, not suffering any one to be idle, or to be occupied about trifles.”

A few years afterwards he gave another description of them. He informed a friend, John Faber, Bishop of Vienna, that More had retired to Chelsea some time before his troubles, and that he had “built on the banks of the Thames, not far from London, a comfortable manor house,

* Knight's “Life,” p. 236. † Jortin's “Life,” vol. ii. p. 366.

neither mean nor magnificent," where he lived in close and endearing intercourse with the members of his family. "You might say," he continues, "that he had in his house another academy of Plato if I did not insult him by the comparison; for in that academy they used to dispute concerning numbers and figures, sometimes concerning virtue and morality. You might more properly call this house the school and gymnasium of the Christian religion. Though all the members of the family make piety the principal object of their concern, yet they find time for liberal studies and for profitable reading. In that house the voice of contention is never heard, no one is ever seen idle. Every one does his duty with alacrity, and not without a temperate cheerfulness. That distinguished man secures the good order of his household not by overbearing and harsh treatment, but by gentleness and kindness. All are diligent in the discharge of their duties, and exhibit, while engaged in them, a spirit of sobriety and cheerfulness."*

A picture of this family was painted in 1528 by the celebrated Hans Holbein, who had been sent to More by Erasmus, with a portrait of him which he had painted, and whom More, after having kept him for two years in his house, introduced to Henry VIII.† The latter was so pleased with his exquisite paintings that he sat to him several times. He also painted more than one of his Queens. More sent Holbein's sketch of the family picture to Erasmus in return for his own. It is preserved in the Basle Museum.‡

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1811, edit. Lugd.

† He was painted in 1517 by Q. Matsys, afterwards by A. Durer, and frequently during his stay at Basle by Holbein, previously to 1526.

‡ The picture itself is lost. The picture exhibited at Kensington in 1866, belonging to Mr. Winn, a descendant of the Ropers, is only a good copy, though it then passed for the original.

But there is one member of this family, Margaret Roper, who ought to be mentioned particularly, because Erasmus had so exalted an opinion of her virtues and abilities that he styled her, in a letter which he sent to her in acknowledgment of the above picture, "*Britanniæ suæ decus.*" He told her that nothing could have given him greater pleasure than to receive a picture in which a family so much respected by him was so exactly delineated, especially since the painter was one whom he had recommended to her father. He added that though he knew every one in the picture at first sight, yet he was more than ordinarily pleased with her own likeness, which brought to his mind all her excellent qualities.* She returned his compliment in an elegant epistle, in which she tells him that she is pleased to find that the piece is acceptable to him, and acknowledges him as her preceptor, to whom she is for ever grateful.

Erasmus, while he wrote to all her brothers and sisters, showed very plainly that she was his favourite; for in one of his letters he tells her that he was unable on account of business and the state of his health to write to all her sisters, and that they must consider what he said to *her* as addressed also to themselves. He also mentions her husband, mother, and brother as particularly deserving of his friendship.† He dedicated, also, to her some hymns of Prudentius. We are informed that she was a perfect prodigy of learning. She and her father once turned two declamations into Latin with so much elegance that no one could say which was the best. This is the same Margaret who, when her beloved father was being conducted back to the Tower after his sentence, burst through the crowd of spectators and soldiers who surrounded him, and clung to him in speechless agony. Sir Thomas gave her a parting kiss and said to her, "My dear Margaret, bear this calamity

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1232, edit. Lugd. † Ibid., p. 1048, edit. Bas.

with patience, and do not any longer grieve for me. It is the will of heaven, and therefore must be endured." After having withdrawn from him for a short distance she again rushed into his arms, when, while the tears ran down his cheeks, he gave her his blessing, begged her prayers for him, and took his farewell of her. History informs us that even the soldiers were moved to tears as they witnessed the separation of two beings bound together by an affection such as is not often witnessed here below.

Thus we see that death broke up that happy family. Sir Thomas indulged the confident expectation that, as he had been united to his two wives by the closest ties during his life, so after death they would not be separated, and that their bodies would moulder into dust together in the same narrow resting-place. Erasmus informs his friend, John Faber, in the letter just referred to, that More had prepared a tomb for himself in the parish church of Chelsea, to which he had removed the body of his former wife. He adds, "On the wall may be seen a tablet containing an account of the events of his life, and recording his intention, which my friend has exactly described to me." More sent to him a copy of the epitaph in the letter announcing his intended resignation, an extract from which has just been given. He states at the close of it in Latin elegiac verses, that in it rests the body of his beloved wife, Joanna; that he intended it as the resting-place of himself and his present wife, Alice; that the latter had the same affection for her step-children which the former had for her own children; and that the one was as much beloved by him as the other. A prayer is added that the tomb and heaven may unite them. "Thus," he says, "death will give us a blessing which we could not enjoy during life." But though that epitaph, or rather a copy of it, may still be seen on the wall of that red brick church on the bank of the Thames,

at Chelsea, where More worshipped with his family, it does not mark the spot where his ashes are enshrined. His wish was not realized. The husband and the two wives, so closely united during life, are not together awaiting the summons to arise from their resting-place. His head was procured from London Bridge by his daughter Margaret after it had remained there fourteen days ; and having been, in compliance with her request, placed in her arms after her death, was buried with her in St. Dunstan's Church, Canterbury. The body has been dissolved into its kindred dust in some unknown spot.

Erasmus wept and watched in imagination around the grave of his illustrious friend. They were united, as we have seen, by ties of no common affection. The character of the one bore a very close resemblance to that of the other. More liked as much the wit of Erasmus, as the spirit which pervaded his serious works. The eyes of both of them had been opened to many of the abuses and corruptions of Romanism. Both were friendly to religious toleration. To the truth of these assertions, in the case of More, many passages in the "Utopia" bear ample and unequivocal testimony. Probably if More, like Erasmus, had died earlier, he would have been reckoned among those, who, though they never separated from the Church of Rome, had endeavoured to heal that spiritual leprosy which she had spread through all orders of human society. Afterwards he exerted every effort to stay the progress of the Reformation. In his "Supplication of the Souls in Purgatory," in reply to a work called "The Supplication of the Beggars," which was very popular at the time, he became the decided apologist of pilgrimages, image-worship, purgatory, and other errors and abuses which he had ridiculed with Erasmus in the early part of his career. He also took an active part in forwarding the work of persecution. He even

openly violated the act of Henry V., and inflicted a lengthened imprisonment on heretics who had been brought before him. Many were by his orders whipped, cruelly racked, and afterwards committed to the flames. Sometimes they were accused of denying the corporal presence; sometimes of condemning strongly the character and habits of the clergy—an accusation which might with justice have been brought against More himself in former years. Thus, as Mr. Froude observes, “the philosopher of the ‘Utopia,’ the friend of Erasmus, whose life was of blameless beauty, whose genius was cultivated to the highest attainable perfection, was to prove to the world that the spirit of persecution is no peculiar attribute of the pedant, the bigot, or the fanatic, but may co-exist with the fairest graces of the human character.”* I may add that he had hitherto been more willing to endure than to inflict evil. Because this was his temper, and this the principle on which he had uniformly acted, because he was also in many points so far beyond the age in which he lived, he has been more strongly condemned for his intolerance than any of his contemporaries.

This great change in his views and feelings may be attributed to the delusion under which he laboured, when he witnessed the excesses of some amongst the Reformers, especially the frenzy of the Anabaptists in Germany, in imagining that the principles of the whole body tended to the subversion, not only of existing institutions, but even to the dissolution of society into its original elements. Erasmus, as we have seen, expressed similar apprehensions. But in consequence of his higher position, and his more resolute character, More had receded farther than his friend from the opinions which he had previously expressed.

No doubt the motive which chiefly led him to burn heretics alive was his assent to the dogma that belief in the

* Froude’s “History of England,” vol. ii. p. 73.

doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church is indispensable to salvation. He had been led to abandon the milder principles of his youth, and looked upon heresy as the worst offence of which a man could be guilty, worse even than murder and parricide. Thus he came to the conclusion that it was right to employ the most violent means for the suppression of the opinions of the Reformers. That this dogma is utterly wrong is proved by its intolerable consequences ; and that it has the worst possible effect upon the human heart is shown by the fact that it destroyed the natural gentleness of his character, which showed itself in all his domestic relations, and led him to think that he was doing God service by writing his arguments on behalf of Romanism in the blood of those who, if Christianity be not a fable, were his very brothers.

Erasmus came to Basle in 1535 to superintend the publication of his "*Ecclesiastes*," the book already referred to, and to see if he could recover his health, and he returned no more to Friburg. He intended to leave it altogether, and to proceed to Brabant, to which he had been invited by Mary, Queen Dowager of Hungary. This book, though it will not form such a preacher as we require in modern days, and though it is rather tedious, yet contains much which is suited to all times and places. The following tale in the first book, in which he condemns the theological pulpit actors of the days in which he lived, will be found both amusing and instructive.* It will serve to show that he had no control over his sportive wit, even when writing on serious subjects: "There was in Italy a preacher called Robert Liciensis, of whose life I choose to say nothing. I shall only say that, if common report speaks true, he had excellent talents for the pulpit. At first he had

* "*Ecclesiastes*," tom. v. p. 641, edit. Bas. Jortin's translation, vol. ii. p. 86.

been one of those who called themselves *Observants*, an honourable title by which they are distinguished from the other orders of St. Francis. As this Order did not suit him, he went to one of those called *Conventuals*, whose way of life is not so rigid. Being one day at an entertainment, where there was an Observant Vicar, a man of capacity, piety, and gravity, he made his boast that he could draw tears from his audience whenever he wished to do so. By this speech he pretended to refute what the other had said to him by way of reproof and reproach, that his sermons produced no good effect, because they came not from his heart, and because his life did not correspond with his doctrine. 'From whom do you draw tears,' he said, 'excepting children and silly women?' 'You, then,' said Liciensis, 'who are so great a man, come to-morrow where I am to preach, and be at such a place in the church where I can observe you, and have a full sight of you, and if I do not make you weep, I will *give* you a supper; if I do, you shall give one to me and this company.' He did not mention the word *pay*, because those people never touch *money*; but there was in the company a friend to the Franciscans, who offered to be security for the Observants. On the following day he went and took the place which was appointed; and then the preacher, after having represented the loving-kindness and mercy of God, and the ingratitude and stubbornness of those whom nothing can call to repentance and to mutual love, began, as in the person of God, to address himself to the human heart. 'O heart!' said he, 'harder than iron, harder than diamonds; for even iron will melt in the fire, and the blood of a goat will dissolve a diamond; but I, do what I can, am not able to draw from thee one single tear.' He carried on his apostrophe with such pathetic vehemence, that at last the Vicar began to weep. As soon as the preacher saw it, stretching forth his hand to-

wards him, he cried out, 'I have conquered.' The audience supposed that he still spoke in the person of God, applauding himself, as it were, for his victory over those who could not refrain from shedding tears. After this, at supper, as the Conventual monk boasted of his success, the Observant replied, smartly enough, 'It was not your eloquence that drew those tears, but the compassion which I then felt for you, and a concern that one of such happy talents should choose rather to serve the world than Jesus Christ.' "

Soon after the time just referred to, the Pope, Paul III., made several learned men Cardinals. He is said to have given them this preferment, partly because he had been strongly condemned for having made his two young nephews Cardinals in 1534, and partly also because he wished to strengthen the See of Rome against the Lutherans. He wished to include Erasmus in the number. "But to my promotion," says Erasmus,* "it was objected that my bad state of health would make me unfit for that function, and that my income was not sufficient; for it is said, that by a decree of the sacred college, none can be admitted whose annual revenues are less than three thousand ducats. So at present they think of loading me with preferments, that I may be qualified for the red hat. This is, as the proverb says, 'To dress a cat in a gown and petticoat.'" He declares that his health would not permit him to accept such favours, and that he could scarcely move from his chamber with safety; and he refused everything which was offered to him. The design was afterwards abandoned. The Pope, however, in a brief dated August 1st, 1535, appointed him Provost of the College of Canons, at Deventer, using very flattering expressions. He declares that "bearing in mind the piety and probity of Erasmus, his superiority in various sciences, and the good services which he had

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1508, edit. Lugd.

rendered to the Apostolic See, in vigorously attacking the deserters of the faith, he gives him the Provostship of Deventer, in the diocese of Utrecht, vacant by the death of John Vinchel, reputed to be worth six hundred florins a-year; that he gives it with great pleasure, and as an earnest of the recompense which he intended to bestow upon his virtue.* Erasmus indeed declared that he would have nothing to do with preferments, and that, as the hour of his death could not be far distant, he would not take upon himself a burden which he had refused in the former part of his life; but the simple fact that it should have been proposed to confer these honours upon him, as well as the reasons given for the latter appointment, afford sad evidence that he was not fulfilling the expectations formed of him in the early part of his life, that he had in fact abandoned the Reformation, and that he was now exerting every effort to level with the ground the rising walls of the fabric of Protestantism.

Erasmus now began to feel very plainly that the hour of his death could not be far distant. Soon after his arrival at Basle he was seized with a violent fit of the gout. From this disorder he had suffered since the beginning of 1534. It was attended with convulsions which very much weakened him. He was able, however, to revise his letters, and to make additions to them. While he was doing so, when he came to any of his old friends, he said with much emotion, "*Hic mortuus est.*" Finding that his correspondents were more of them dead than living, he burst into an agony of grief, and exclaimed, "I desire not, if it please the Lord, to live any longer." He was much affected at losing almost all his friends in ten years. If those in England had not perished in the common course of nature, or by the hands of the executioner, still they were altogether dead to himself;

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 624.

for they could not, in those dangerous days, carry on intercourse with him even through the imperfect medium of epistolary correspondence. We shall easily understand how it was that fearfulness and trembling had come upon the inhabitants of the land, when we remember that in the years 1535 and 1536 the monasteries were dissolved, that insurrections were breaking out which were with difficulty quelled, that, as I have said, More, Fisher, Anne Boleyn, and Lord Rochford, her brother, were beheaded, and that if the breath of suspicion rested on any one, not even the greatest public services could preserve him from falling a victim to the caprice of an arbitrary monarch.

About the beginning of autumn he was attacked by dysentery, so that for a whole month he was seldom out of his bed, and only once over the threshold of his chamber. While he was lying in agony he wrote a treatise "*De Puritate Ecclesiæ*," and made a last effort to finish his work on Origen. Thus we see that excruciating torture could not impose any restraint upon his industry, nor damp his ardour in the prosecution of his studies. In the summer he grew worse. The last letter which we have from him is dated June 28.* He subscribes it thus, *Eras. Rot. œgra manu*. It is a letter to his old friend Goclenius, who had advised him to write to a lady of the House of Nassau. "If you had known," he said, "exactly the state of my affairs, you would have sent word to this lady that I had been obliged to depart from Friburg on account of my bad health, with a design to go to Bezançon as soon as I had finished my '*Ecclesiastes*,' that I might still continue in the Emperor's territories. But my disease growing worse, I have been obliged to pass the winter at Basle; for although I am here with my best friends, and such as I could not have at Friburg, yet because of the difference of religious sentiments, I should have been

* Jortin's "*Life*," vol. i. p. 576.

glad to end my days elsewhere. I wish Brabant were nearer at hand."

He had been, as I have said, suffering from dysentery, and had seen plainly for some months that the time of his departure could not be far distant. He foretold it again three days, and then two days before his death. He told Amerbach, Froben, and Episcopius, who came in to pay him a visit, that in them he beheld Job's three friends, and asked them smiling, why they had not rent their clothes, and put ashes on their heads. He retained his speech and reason to the last, and breathed out his soul in these ejaculations, "Mercy, sweet Jesus, how long? Jesus, fountain of mercy, have mercy on me." He died calmly at midnight on July 12th, 1536, surrounded by friends who had made common cause with Zuinglius and Ecolampadius, without one prayer to the Virgin Mary, or to any of those Saints whom the Church of Rome has taught her followers to regard with a superstitious reverence.

Multitudes flocked from all parts to see his remains. His funeral was solemnized with the greatest honour. The senators of Basle, and the whole University accompanied his body to the grave. He was interred in the cathedral church under a monument of Parian marble. The inscription was drawn up by his heir, Amerbach, from which it appears that he was buried in July. Close to the monument is a bust of the god Terminus, taken from a seal-ring which he always used, given to him by his pupil, the Archbishop of St. Andrew's, on which were engraved the god Terminus and these words, "Cedo nulli." His biographer, Knight, observes that he did not use these words in a vainglorious sense, but for the purpose of quickening that ardour which served to place him on the very pinnacle of literary glory.

His death was lamented by the republic of letters, and the best wits of the day wrote funeral elegies upon it. His

will was confirmed by the Emperor and the Pope. It appears from it that in consequence of the liberality of his friends he was not, as he sometimes represented himself, in bad circumstances. It was reported at the time of his death that he left more than 7000 ducats. A reference is made in it to the sale of his library to John à Lasco, on the condition that he also should have the use of it during his lifetime. He left Boniface Amerbach his heir, and made several small bequests to other friends. One of his bequests is very remarkable. His rings, plate, and jewels, and other curiosities were to be sold, and the money was to be distributed in the first place to those who had become poor by age or sickness, then to maidens destitute of fortune towards their marriage, and lastly, to hopeful but poor scholars for the encouragement of their studies. Melchior Adam informs us that, after his death, some persons who had interest at the Emperor's Court, said that his will ought to be set aside, his estate confiscated, and his works prohibited, because he had died a heretic and a Lutheran, and that they would have been successful if Mudæus, an eminent lawyer, once a disciple of Erasmus, and much in favour with the Emperor, had not prevented the execution of their design.*

A wooden statue had been erected at Rotterdam by the magistrates, in 1549, and placed on the arch of the stone bridge, in honour of Erasmus, on occasion of the visit of Philip II. to that city. Afterwards, in 1557, it was changed for another of fine blue stone, but the Spaniards, urged on by a certain monk of their nation, shot it down with their muskets, and threw it into the water. When the Spaniards were driven out of the town, the statue was set up again, by order of the magistrates. It was succeeded by a third, cast of copper or brass, at the public expense, which

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 596.

was not quite finished and exposed to view till 1662. This is a master-piece of art, rather bigger than life, nobly habited in a gown. He is represented as turning over the leaves of a book. The statue stands in an open part of the city, by the side of a canal, upon a pedestal adorned with inscriptions, and surrounded with iron rails. Over the tailor's house in the Brede Kirk Street, where he was born, Rotterdam, proud to claim him as her citizen, has placed the following inscription—"Hæc est parva domus natus quâ magnus Erasmus."

I may here state that Beatus Rhenanus informs us that he was low of stature, but not remarkably short, that he was well-shaped, of a fair complexion, with hair, in his youth, of a pale yellow colour, gray eyes, a cheerful countenance, a low voice, and an agreeable elocution, and that he was neat in his apparel. He adds that he was an agreeable companion, a constant friend, generous and charitable.* The same friend says that he seldom went to mass without bestowing an alms.

I have now finished the Life of Erasmus. I have condemned in former pages his timidity, and all those faults which have tarnished the fame of services rendered in the early part of his career to the cause of the Reformation. But, with the exception of a few captious critics, all have admitted that literary excellence which has secured for him a high place amongst men of letters, and has been the means of transmitting his name with honour to succeeding generations. If we take into account the difference of times and circumstances, that he did not possess many of the aids with which we are so abundantly favoured, we must be astonished at the vast amount of knowledge which he acquired. He was one of those intellectual giants whose strength almost "surpassed nature's law." I have already

* Jortin, vol. i. p. 580.

referred to his prodigious memory. A careful examination will serve to show us that he never inserts in one book a passage used in another. He was himself a kind of living library. He could remember, without turning to the author, any passage of which he wished to make use for argument or illustration. His amazing intellectual powers were greatly aided by an untiring industry which led him cheerfully to endure that "weariness of the flesh" which springs from excessive study, in order that he might gratify his thirst for knowledge, and promote the onward march of intellectual and moral improvement.

We have already seen that he owed to himself almost all his knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages. In the latter he may, as I have said, have been surpassed by Budaëus; but in the former he was absolutely unrivalled. He had, by long habit, formed a style of Latinity, not indeed framed exactly on the model of Cicero, for he laughed to scorn those who rejected every word which was not to be found in the works of the illustrious orator; but still remarkably pure, masculine, and nervous, and admirably suited to be the vehicle of that sparkling wit, that cutting satire, that sophistry, those "thoughts that breathe, those words that burn," with which he astonished, delighted, edified, instructed, provoked, and offended many thousands of his contemporaries. His verses are remarkable for good sense, but they do not exhibit the same elegance of taste as his prose. They are also deficient in poetical numbers. His works are remarkable for conciseness and condensation. Words are always employed in them which, if they fail to carry conviction, render his meaning intelligible to the reader. He wrote with remarkable rapidity, and had not the patience to subject his writings to careful revision, so that very often much escaped his observation which ought to have been corrected. He threw all his first thoughts on

paper, like diamonds rough from the mine, which have never been polished into beauty, and cut into symmetry by the hand of the skilful artificer.

Erasmus lived for literature. He laboured most energetically to promote its progress throughout the Continent of Europe. It was his earnest wish that Melancthon should devote himself to polite learning, because he saw that he possessed talents of the highest order, which peculiarly qualified him to appreciate, and to make known to others, the beauties in the works of those poets, orators, philosophers, and historians who have reared to themselves in them a durable monument.* One of his reasons for separating himself from the Reformers was that he thought that the Reformation was becoming the all-absorbing subject of attention, and was leading to the neglect of polite literature, the cultivation of which would, he hoped, be instrumental in promoting the moral and spiritual regeneration of Europe. Of this idea I have already spoken, and still have to add a few words upon it. We must admit that by his indefatigable labours he contributed greatly to disperse the gross darkness which covered the nations. Hitherto all who wished to make progress in ancient literature had repaired to Italy in order that they might receive instruction from the distinguished emigrants who had settled in that country, having brought with them the works of the Greek authors, which they had snatched from the Byzantine libraries, and had thus saved from the destruction with which they were threatened. The Italians, that they might make a gain of the vast numbers who flocked to their shores, endeavoured to keep in their own hands the key which unlocked the golden cabinet. But Erasmus disappointed their expectations. To him mainly it was owing

* See the quotations from Luther's epistles, given in "Milner's Church History," vol. v. p. 324.

that all, without crossing the ocean, were able to gaze upon the invaluable treasures. He brought learning to their own homes, and excited that spirit of industry which led them to devote themselves with indefatigable ardour to the prosecution of their studies. We shall be greatly surprised that he should have been instrumental in accomplishing this great intellectual revolution, when we remember that he was born in poverty and obscurity, that he never held any lucrative employment or public benefice; that he was indebted for the means of defraying his necessary expenses to the precarious bounty of his friends and admirers; that often, in the earlier part of his career, he had no money to buy those books without which he could not hope that his labours would be crowned with the wished-for success; that he was destitute of those means and appliances for the study of classical authors with which we are so abundantly favoured; that, during a part of his life he was wandering about from place to place, engaged in visiting those public libraries where he might obtain information which would be of service to him in the composition of his works; that he was afflicted with an incurable disorder, the stone, which caused him excruciating agony, obliged him, as he informs Wolsey's physician,* for twenty years to read and write standing or leaning, and to sit very little except at meals, often interrupting him in his studies, and threatening to bring him to a premature grave; and that he had to spend the time which he was anxious to devote to the pursuit of learning, in answering those invectives of his opponents to which he had rendered himself obnoxious during the last sad years of his memorable career.

Erasmus was a most voluminous writer. His works were published after his death, in 1540, by B. Rhenanus at the press of Froben at Basle, in nine folio volumes. They were

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1814, edit. Lugd.

afterwards published in ten volumes by Le Clerc, at Leyden, in 1703. We may form some idea of the number of his publications, and of the editions through which they have passed, when we hear that one large volume among the catalogues at the British Museum is appropriated to them. I shall not now enumerate all the works which have already come before us. Of these, the Adages, the Epistles, the New Testament, and the Paraphrases, occupy each one by itself a large folio volume. Gradually, most of his works have ceased to be read, not because any want of merit has been discovered in them, but because the subjects discussed are better understood, and because subsequent treatises on them, written in modern languages, have superseded their use. Before I conclude this part of our subject, I will refer to those not already mentioned. They include many editions of classical authors, besides works designed to assist in classical studies, and a large work called the "Apophthegms of the Ancients," containing many brilliant gems; as well as thirty smaller works on religious subjects. Some of them which are devotional, are of a commonplace character. He published also thirty-five minor treatises on general subjects, respecting some of which the same observation may be made. The only one not already referred to, which rises above mediocrity, is a treatise concerning the manner of writing letters on all subjects, which may be read with pleasure on account of its exquisite Latinity, the information supplied by it respecting the titles and forms by which great men were then addressed, and the modes of speech, considered particularly courteous, which, he felt, would soon be no more needed. When we hear that he published, as I have said, many works of the Fathers, together with more than twenty Apologies, some of them of great length, we shall have some idea of those "*πόντοι Ἡράκλειοι*," those "Hercu-

lean labours," which have secured for him an immortal memory among his fellow-creatures.

I have now little more to say about Erasmus. We may gather from his writings that he was remarkable for his warm and generous disposition, and that he was full of kindness to all around him. He was certainly too sensitive when he was attacked by his adversaries. He could advise others who suffered in the same way to leave the jackdaws to their fate; but he could not follow his own advice. He was too ready to make a reply to them, and always attacked them with great bitterness. The "Spongia" to Hutten, in which he animadverts in a tone of savage delight upon his debts, his disease, and his poverty, affords a sad evidence of the truth of the preceding assertion. He does not seem to have been covetous, nor ambitious of ecclesiastical dignities. It was his wish only to have sufficient means to be enabled to prosecute, without distraction, his beloved studies. The largest desires of his heart had been gratified. He was the idol before which all the learned men in Europe were bowing down in solemn adoration. It was his conviction that if he had accepted ecclesiastical preferment, he would have entered into a splendid servitude. He would have been bound with golden fetters, and would have been unable to assail the abuses and corruptions of the Church and Court of Rome.

Some of his works are remarkable for the tone of earnest piety which pervades them, and for the important practical precepts, applicable to all times and circumstances, which they contain. His critical investigations, however, led him to a somewhat freer view of inspiration than had been common before him. He thought it unnecessary to attribute everything in the Apostles to miraculous teaching. Christ, he said, suffered the Apostles to err, and that, too, after the descent of the Paraclete; but not so

as to endanger the faith. He remarks that the Epistle to the Hebrews is not entirely in the style of the Apostle Paul. He doubts whether St. John the Apostle wrote the Apocalypse. He often accuses the Evangelists of lapses of memory, and I regret to say that a rationalistic spirit constantly appears in his writings.

It is scarcely possible not to observe that the mind of Erasmus was essentially sceptical. He had doubts about almost everything except the existence of God, and the obligation of the moral law. He wished the articles of faith to be brought within a very narrow compass. The following observations are to be found in the introduction to his edition of St. Hilary :—"The sum of our religion is peace, which cannot easily be preserved unless we define very few points ; and in most matters leave every one to form his own judgment." He afterwards says that it had occurred to him, in examining the works of Hilary, that, while every effort is made to impress us with the belief that the Son is very God of very God, nothing is said about the Holy Spirit, and His equality with the Father. One reason which he assigns for this fact is that, on account of His human nature, it is more difficult to believe Christ to be God. Then occur the following very objectionable words on the teaching of Holy Scripture as to the Three Persons : "The Father is very frequently called God, the Son sometimes, the Holy Spirit never."

I am sorry also to have to state that a passage in the same introduction exhibits his strong sympathy with the Arians. "How furiously Hilary attacks the Arians ! He calls them impious, blasphemous, devils, pests, enemies of Christ, as if the name of heretic were nothing. And yet it is probable that some members of the Arian party believed that their teaching concerning Christ was in accordance with truth and piety. Many great authorities support the doctrine ;

many passages of Scripture are in favour of it ; and there are not wanting arguments for it which have the appearance of truth." I know indeed that he has denied the charge in question ; but when we find him writing in the above manner, maintaining that the Arians surpassed their adversaries in learning and eloquence, that they were skilful in the knowledge of the Scriptures, that they might be good men and in the favour of God notwithstanding their error ; when we read these words in the "Inquisition of Faith,"—"The Son also is of God, but He is of God the Father. The Father alone is of none, and *obtains the principal place among the Divine Persons*," and find him asserting that Arius and his followers were ill-used by consubstantialists ; when we further find him giving an Arian interpretation to certain texts which are commonly used against that party, and saying that "so great is his respect for the authority of the Church that he could agree with the Arians and Pelagians if the Church had supported their doctrines ;"* we cannot fail to come to the conclusion, notwithstanding his assertion to the contrary, that with the Church's consent, he would gladly have professed that creed which nullifies Christianity, by denying our Lord's consubstantiality with the Father.

I have already observed that the sarcastic humour of Erasmus, even when directed against superstition, was often irreverent and unseasonable. The following is an instance of the truth of that assertion. Describing the revolution at Basle in 1529 to his friend Pirckheimer, he says, "The images of the saints, and even of the crucifix, have been treated with so much ludicrous insult, that it may be thought extraordinary that no miracle should have been wrought on the occasion, especially as the saints of former times performed plenty of them in consequence of slight affronts."† Again, writing to Andreas Critius, he says,

* See p. 285.

† Op. tom. iii. p. 1188, edit. Lugd.

"They tell horrid stories of saints who, in many instances, punished persons for using profane expressions ; insomuch that I cannot but wonder that not one out of so many should revenge himself on the authors of this prodigious devastation. As to the mildness of Christ and the Blessed Virgin, I am not at all surprised at it."*

The preceding examples will have served to show the tendency of Erasmus's mind on religious subjects. He seems to have imagined that if a man's life were consistent with the fair rules of order and morality, his faith might be left without hazard to the decision of his own judgment ; and that, however he might be assailed by the advocates of bigotry, he would stand acquitted before that Being, who knows the waywardness of the human mind, and who will judge us according to our works. Adequately to expose the unsoundness of this opinion would require a long discussion. Suffice it now to appeal to the authoritative decision in those words of the Apostle, which are dictated by the Spirit of unerring wisdom, and are left upon record as a lasting evidence of the evil of false principles, and the unspeakable value of the genuine religion of Christ : "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."† "The question of questions," as Mr. Froude observes, in a lecture on Erasmus, which presents on the whole a just view of his character, "is what all this latitudinarian philosophy, this cultivated epicurean gracefulness, would have come to, if left to itself ; or rather what was the effect which it was producing ? If you wish to remove an old building without bringing it in ruins about your ears, you must begin at the

* Op. tom. iii. p. 1223, edit. Lugd.

† Galat. i. 8, 9.

top, remove stones gradually downwards, and touch the foundation last. But latitudinarianism loosens the elementary principles of theology, destroys the premises on which the dogmatic system rests. . . . The practical effect of this, as the world then stood, would have been only to make the educated into infidels, and to leave the multitude to a convenient but debasing superstition.”*

Observations already made will have served to indicate the true position of Erasmus with reference to the Reformation. We have seen that he was utterly disqualified for becoming a standard-bearer in the army of the Reformers. The herculean strength of Luther was required for the accomplishment of that great and glorious religious revolution. Erasmus seems from the very first to have resolved not to move on with the times. I wish, indeed, that it had been otherwise; and that he had resolved to accept those great doctrines without the proclamation of which the Reformation could not have been brought, as we shall see directly, to a successful issue. That he did not agree with Luther on the doctrine of original sin, appears plainly from the following passages: “I have shown that Paul, when he says that we are children of wrath, may be understood to speak, not of men’s condition by nature, but of the depraved state of their morals, into which they have voluntarily brought themselves.”† Again he seems to assert in his “Paraphrase,” that original sin consists in following the example of our first parents.‡ In both these passages he differs from Article IX. of the Church of England, in which we are told that “Original sin standeth not in the following of *Adam*, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is

* Froude’s “Short Studies on Great Subjects.”

† “Hyperaspistes,” tom. ix. edit. Bas.

‡ “Paraphrase” of Rom. v. 12.

ingendered of the offspring of *Adam*." I have already stated that he differed from Luther and the other Reformers on the great doctrine of justification by faith, and I need not adduce additional evidence of the truth of this assertion.

Now it was because Erasmus opposed the great doctrines just referred to, because he hoped, by literature and cultivation, to accomplish his object, that he failed hopelessly in his scheme for the regeneration of European society. Of what use is the mere knowledge of literature and science, independently of religious truth, in taming the passions, in quenching pride, in moderating ambition, in stifling envy, and all the malignant passions of the natural heart? How, too, can it preserve a man from those crimes and excesses which degrade human nature, and place him on a level with the beasts that perish? But union to Christ by faith necessitates the renunciation of every known sin; attraction to God by Christ prevents the deliberate omission of any acknowledged duty. Having laid the foundation in "faith," then, enjoins the Apostle, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue." The mere knowledge of science and literature, unconnected with the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, cannot "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;" it may shed a gleam of light over the "cloudy and dark day" of adversity, and minister consolation during the weary moments of languor and disease; but it cannot cleanse us from that moral pollution with which our nature is infected; it cannot deprive death of its sting, and the grave of its victory; it cannot speak peace to the man who is troubled with a deep sense of his sinfulness; it cannot give us the assurance of pardon and reconciliation with our Maker; it cannot ensure us approval on the day of judgment; it cannot "minister unto us an entrance abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ." Then only can we hope to be instrumental in saving the souls of others around us, and in promoting the peace and good order of human society, when we constantly exhibit Christ as the sole atonement for known and forsaken sin, and as the best example of virtuous and holy living; Christian morals as founded upon Christian doctrine, and Christian principles as leading to Christian practice; to "the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

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